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The Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — Bobcat Co. is investing \$35 million in an expansion and renovations in Bismarck, about 3 ½ years after closing its manufacturing plant and laying off nearly 500 workers.

The compact construction equipment maker broke ground Monday on a \$20 million research-and-development facility at its existing site at the Northern Plains Commerce Centre. Construction is expected to be done in about a year. The company is spending another \$15 million on renovations to the existing facility, which had served as a warehouse.

Bobcat has hired an additional 135 people for the expanded facility, bringing its workforce in Bismarck to 625.

Rich Goldsbury, Bobcat's president for North America and Oceania, told The Bismarck Tribune that employees across the company are developing new ideas, but getting everyone in a room is not something the company has previously done well. He said he hopes the innovation center will enable Bobcat to develop ideas at a faster pace.

"Because we're an international company, speed to market is very important," he said.

West Fargo-based Bobcat bills itself as North Dakota's largest manufacturer, and also has sites in Fargo, Gwinner and Wahpeton. It closed its manufacturing plant in Bismarck in December 2009 but later opened a support center in the city and announced plans for the new facility, dubbed the Acceleration Center.

Gov. Jack Dalrymple and U.S. Sens. Heidi Heitkamp and John Hoeven were on hand Monday for the groundbreaking ceremony. Hoeven traveled to South Korea on a trade mission in 2011, and while there met with the chairman of Doosan Corp., Bobcat's parent company. Hoeven said he encouraged Youngmaan Park to expand in North Dakota.

"We appreciate Bobcat's expansion, and in particular, we welcome the Acceleration Center, the company's outstanding new innovation facility in Bismarck where it will create, design and test the cutting-edge products of the future," Hoeven said in a statement.

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