

The Greenville News

October 18, 2005

Kayak maker boosts hiring *Acquisition, corporate consolidation bringing N.C. jobs to Easley factory*

By Rudolph Bell
BUSINESS WRITER
dmbell@greenvillenews.com

EASLEY --Kayak and canoe maker Confluence Holdings Corp. said Monday it will hire 200 to 300 people over the next four months -- half full time, half temporary -- as it ramps up production at the Easley factory it bought earlier this year.

Rich Feehan, Confluence's chief executive, said most of the new jobs will be machine operators, assemblers and parts fabricators.

"We also have quite a need for shift supervision -- people who are familiar with running production lines," he said.

It was good news for unemployed truck driver Chris Austin of Pickens, who said he had to move in with his mother after losing his income.

Advertisement

"I've got three kids that depend on me," said Austin, 43. "By me not making anything right now, it's not only hurting me, it's hurting them."

Confluence said it pays assembly-line workers at the Easley plant between \$8 and \$15 an hour, depending on experience and length of service.

The company said it also has white-collar openings in the areas of purchasing, information technology, finance and logistics.

About half the 200 to 300 jobs would be full time on the Confluence payroll with benefits while the rest would be temporary, seasonal positions on the payroll of staffing agencies, Feehan said.

Confluence was based in Trinity, N.C., and competed with WaterMark Paddlesports, the former owner of the Easley plant, before buying WaterMark's kayak business in a deal completed in May.

The acquisition gave Confluence two leading kayak brands, Perception and Dagger, to add to the ones it already had, Wilderness Systems and Wave Sport.

After buying WaterMark's kayak business, Confluence closed its North Carolina plant and moved production to the Easley plant that came with the acquisition.

"We've moved all of that equipment down here (to Easley), and now we need a team to operate it," Feehan said.

Confluence also said Monday it would begin round-the-clock manufacturing at the Easley plant for the first time.

"We need to double the output of boats in the plant this year compared to last year," Feehan said.

Confluence also makes Mad River canoes, WindRider sailing trimarans and water-sports accessories.

Ray Farley, Pickens County's economic development director, said the new jobs "are coming at a very good time," given layoffs at the Techtronic Industries tool plant in Pickens and the closing of the WestPoint Stevens plant in Oconee County.