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Champion to expand
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LIBERTY – Champion Aerospace in Liberty is expanding its product line, bringing an opportunity for 30 to 45 new jobs to the area, according to company officials.

In September 2008, the company acquired the products from Unison Industries, LLC, a subsidiary of General Electric, including highly engineered SLICK magnetos, harnesses and components.

The products are used in general aviation aircraft and are approved for use on virtually all of the world's most popular general aviation aircraft, according to Champion officials who announced the new product line Tuesday.

The jobs will become immediately available, and the company will use the S.C. Employment Services office in Liberty to take applications, according to Ray Farley with Alliance Pickens.

Farley said Champion's parent company, TransDigm Group, had a choice of several plants to locate the work but chose Liberty.

"This is a real testament to our Pickens County workforce," he said. "It has proven itself time and time again in specialty product manufacturing that requires a high level of engineering and a high level of skill on the manufacturing floor."

Champion's president Bernt Iversen II called the new product line an "excellent fit" to the existing ones.

"The combination of SLICK magnetos and harnesses with Champion's spark plugs and oil filters into our Liberty plant strengthens our position as a leader in the supply of complete piston ignition systems to the general aviation industry," he said.

Farley also noted that Champion's acquisition was a step in the right direction for strengthening the longevity of industry in the county.

"A Pickens County manufacturer is receiving new capital investment, new equipment and machinery and new technology that it didn't have before," he said. "The more capital expenditures that go into a Pickens County industry, the longer term the viability is for that plant."

He also said owners do not anticipate having to expand the plant to manufacture the new products.

“They think they can move thins around and make room to put in the equipment,” Farley said.

He said Champion officials approached those who worked on the project on a short time frame, including the S.C. Department of Commerce, Ready S.C. (the state’s job training program), Pickens County Council, Alliance Pickens and Duke Energy.

“And in very short order, we pulled together a very good program, and the county is very grateful for their efforts,” Farley said.

Pickens County Council chairman Neil Smith said it was always a pleasure to welcome a new employer but that it was even more rewarding to congratulate an existing industry on its success.

“Great job and thanks for being part of Pickens County,” he said.

Champion Aerospace moved to Liberty from Toledo, Ohio in 1986, according to company officials. The plant produces turbine engine excitors, leads and igniters, spark plugs, filters, harnesses and power converters.