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High-tech medical company to create more jobs in Pickens

**By Stephanie Tracy
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LIBERTY — St. Jude Medical, an international cardiovascular device manufacturer, announced Tuesday it will build a manufacturing and development plant in the Pickens County Commerce Park.

The new 100,000-square-foot facility will produce capacitors for implantable defibrillators, and will initially employ an extra 100 workers over the next five years in addition to the almost 200 employees staffing the company's three existing operations in Pickens County.

The project represents an estimated \$15 million initial capital investment in the commerce park and the county, and company representatives said Tuesday there are plans to expand the facility in stages to a maximum size of 300,000 square feet.

"This is a major capital expansion of St. Jude Medical in Pickens County," said Alliance Pickens Executive Director Ray Farley. "If not but for the investment the county chose to make in itself in terms of infrastructure, we wouldn't be here today."

St. Jude Medical first established itself in Pickens County as Maven Capacitor in the early 1990s. The company currently staffs lab facilities in Liberty near the Pickens County Airport, main manufacturing operations in downtown Pickens and another facility on Circle Drive outside Pickens.

Tom Strange, director of research and development for the Pickens facilities, said the company will be hiring workers for a variety of departments, and all of the jobs will require at least a high school diploma.

Economic development and political leaders present for the announcement said the project proved that Pickens County could compete in the global market with its workforce and business climate.

"St. Jude Medical could have gone anywhere, but they didn't — they came here," said state Rep. B.R. Skelton, R-Pickens. "They knew the government climate, the business climate?the amenities we have here with the mountains and lakes and recreation areas."

Clemson University Vice President for Research and Economic Development Chris Przirembel said the county's high-performing schools, as well as partnerships between the university and industries provided a solid basis for growth in the high-tech industries.

St. Jude Medical will occupy 33.6 acres — the second largest tract of land in the commerce park behind Reliable Sprinkler Company, whose plant already under construction sits on a more than 50-acre lot. Keymark Inc. a Piedmont-based computer software company, also plans to build office space in the park.

Founded in 1976 as a heart valve company, St. Jude Medical posted \$1.9 billion in net sales in 2003, and employs more than 7,000 people in 20 operations and manufacturing facilities worldwide.

In addition to implantable defibrillators, St. Jude Medical produces pacemakers, mechanical heart valve devices and suture-less connectors for heart bypass surgery.

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