



Daily Journal

October 30, 2008

Longtime Pickens industry to stay put

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PICKENS — Like most areas, Pickens County has experienced its share of plant closings in recent years. However, one longtime plant, slated for the same fate, is experiencing a much happier ending.

Techtronic Industries, which purchased the Pickens plant from Ryobi in 2000, first informed Alliance Pickens that it planned to move its operations to Mexico during the first quarter of 2009. Such a move would have effectively closed the Pickens facility that had been in operation since 1935 — initially as Singer — and impacted approximately 120 jobs.

However, Alliance Pickens Executive Director Ray Farley said Techtronic is staying in the county — thanks to the efforts of the Pickens County Council, City of Pickens, the South Carolina Department of Commerce and Duke Energy. Not only have they, along with Alliance Pickens, enabled TTI to remain in place, the plant itself will soon be undergoing an expansion project consisting of a \$3.8 million investment and the creation of 152 new jobs.

“These jobs are coming at a very important time for the Pickens community,” Farley said. “This serves as a prime example of how a small community can save one of its industries from shutting down.”

Lee Sowell, president of the Outdoor Products Group of TTI, said the company is also pleased to remain in Pickens County.

“The strong workforce in the county provides us with the skills necessary to grow our operations with additional product lines,” Sowell said. “The state’s business-friendly environment also serves to benefit our operations, and we appreciate all the support we have received from the state and local officials.”

When TTI informed Pickens County of plans to move its refurbishing business out of Pickens, Farley said Alliance Pickens and the Department of Commerce were able to work with company executives to bring a new product line to the state. Farley said TTI will move its generator business from China to Pickens County and begin producing gas powered string trimmers in the first quarter of 2009.

In addition, Farley said the company began manufacturing gas-powered chain saws in the third quarter of this year and will expand production of its pressure washer products.

“As far as we were concerned, failure was not an option on allowing the Pickens plant to close,” Farley said. “The Pickens TTI plant is the fabric of the community and, in some cases, three and four generations of the same family have worked

at and retired from that facility. So, the thoughts of potentially allowing that plant to close and grow cold is something we couldn't allow to happen."

Farley said the new product lines would allow TTI to maintain its existing workforce of 120 employees as well as create new job opportunities in Pickens County. Ed Parris, chairman of Alliance Pickens, said he is personally excited because of the great work ethic possessed by employees of the company.

'We can take great pride that their quality products will continue to be produced in Pickens," Parris said.

TTI is a supplier of home improvement products, employing more than 20,000 people worldwide. Farley said a celebratory luncheon took place Wednesday at the Pickens Recreation Center on Sangamo Road.