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Automotive plant staying put
450 jobs saved, 115 new jobs on horizon

By Ginny Johnson
Staff Writer

PICKENS COUNTY “It was an emergency.”

So said Alliance Pickens Chairman Ed Parris of plans to close the Dayco-Mark IV plant in Easley, effectively eliminating 450 jobs.

Mark IV Industries Inc. was acquired this summer by Sun Capital Partners, Inc. which is now operating the network of businesses under the FRS name.



Fluid Routing Solutions workers such as Marion Butler, Thomasina Hicks, Junia Marie Thomas and Thomas Harold can feel secure now that the company has decided to remain in Easley.



“What a great day. What a fantastic Christmas present. If it wasn’t for those 450 man and women who are trying to do something different in Pickens County and in their lives, this announcement wouldn’t have happened.” – Rep. Gresham Barrett

Now known as Fluid Routing Solutions Inc., the company was initially going to consolidate by closing the Easley plant and moving to Quebec, Canada.

“As grandpa would say, the cow had left the barn’ on this one,” said Alliance Pickens Executive Director Ray Farley. “It was done, it was a done deal.”

Farley and several others couldn’t let the company go without a fight.

“That was not a good day when I got that phone call,” Farley said. “It would have been years to replace those 450 jobs.”

Twelve-year veteran employee Melinda Couch said everyone was sad when they got the word.



"I just don't subscribe to the notion that you have to go to China to be competitive and the folks in this plant are finding ways to combat that." – Russell Williams, Fluid Routing Solutions

"It was just heartbreaking," Couch said.

Now, thanks to fast action and persuasive negotiations, FRS announced Tuesday, that not only would it keep the local plant open, but that it was also moving its Canadian operations to Pickens County.

"I'm so happy," Couch said. "I think we're really moving forward in the right direction."

Parris said local and state government had a large role in making it happen.

"The great sense of urgency that our County Council exhibited in reacting to this situation it was an emergency," Parris said. "We really appreciate what you folks did to save these jobs."

The state Department of Commerce as well as Pickens County Council assisted in making this

negotiation a smooth one by offering incentives.

Deputy Secretary of commerce Jack Ellenberg said the entire scenario will be used as a model for other industries trying to stay in South Carolina.

"The whole idea of retention is one we pay close attention to," Ellenberg said. "We certainly want to use this as a model and point to it as an example. Not only can you stay here, but you can grow here as well."

It's a testimony to the cooperative spirit of South Carolina and Pickens County, he said.

"Anytime you have a situation where you can retain jobs as well as add to them, it's a great opportunity," Ellenberg said. "It positions Pickens (County) very well in automotive sector. We hope it's the beginning of more."

Incentives included job-tax credits, job development credits, training for the new jobs and county fee-in-lieu-of-tax on new investment including machinery, new buildings or additions and property tax, Farley said.

"The success story we're enjoying today is really a great example of how collaboration and teamwork can result in economic development success," Parris said.

Additionally, 115 new jobs with more growth potential on the horizon is being bestowed upon Pickens County with the closure of the Quebec site.

“Big sigh of relief,” Farley said. “And it comes at a good time.”

Rep. Gresham Barrett agreed.

“What a fantastic Christmas present,” Barrett said. “What a great day.”

FRS’ Russell Williams said the beautiful sunny weather accompanying the announcement really mirrored the outlook of the Easley plant.

“In contrast to the rainy, cloudy weather there is a little bit of symbolism,” Williams said, adding that it’s his passion to keep industry in the U.S.

“Keeping manufacturing jobs in North America,” Williams said. “I just don’t subscribe to the notion that you have to go to China to be competitive and the folks in this plant are finding ways to combat that.”

Said County Council Chairman G. Neil Smith, “We are very thankful we didn’t lose 450 jobs this holiday season.

“We’re very happy that we were able to persuade FRS after months of negotiations that Pickens County was the best site for consolidating its operations,” Smith said. “This is a nice Christmas present for the FRS employees and their families.”

Farley asked that no one forget the sacrifice made by the employees and families in Quebec who, because of Pickens County’s victory, have lost their jobs.

“We know that we are good people we also know that the folks in Canada are good people,” Farley said. “They rise and shine every morning like we do, they care and love their families and they need to support their families just like we do. And we don’t want to forget that.”

FSR officials made the announcement at a press conference at the former Mark IV site, now with a Fluid Routing Solutions sign out front.

“In the short term, they’re going to physically move out of the Easley plant the warehousing elements, the non-manufacturing elements,” Farley said.

The materials will be housed locally where supplies can be trucked to and from, as well as finished product prior to shipping, Farley said.

“In that vacated floor space, they’re going to move the Canadian capital equipment in and hire the folks there,” Farley said, adding that the process is expected to take between 18-24 months.

FSR’s next decision is whether to expand the existing site or build new in the Pickens County Commerce Park.

“Either way, it’s a win for the community,” Farley said.

Another possibility for the company is to relocate its Michigan headquarters to Pickens County.

“This is the epitome of teamwork,” Farley said. “In a very short period, we called in a significant number of people who could effect change on their decision.”

Still, there was no need for arm twisting, he said.

“A main factor in consolidating and expanding here, is our Pickens County workforce,” Farley said. “They’ve said more than once how pleased they are with our area workforce.”

Said new Operations Manager for power steering products Tim Parys, “In the end, it came down to the excellent workforce in Pickens County that made staying in Pickens County the best decision for our business.

“The experience level, the strong work ethic and the flexibility of the workforce is vital to our company’s ongoing success,” Parys said. “And we’re pleased to remain an active member of this business community.”

Barrett agreed.

“If it wasn’t for those 450 men and women who are trying to do something different in Pickens County and in their lives, this announcement wouldn’t have happened,” Barrett said.

Other aspects that attracted FSR included state training programs like readySC and the proximity of Clemson University and implications of Clemson-ICAR.

“They saw what was available in our area and I think they started to get it,” Farley said.

“They really have more of an entire package here quality of life, the pace of life and cost of living,” Farley said.

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