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St. Jude Medical opens 2nd plant

Manufacturer already turning out components at new Liberty facility

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LIBERTY - Civic and political leaders came to Liberty on April 9 to get their first peek at a new manufacturing facility that could employ as many as 300 people within the next five years.

St. Jude Medical Inc., which already has a plant in Liberty, celebrated the

dedication of a new Liberty manufacturing facility, one that produces the tiny, electronic "brains" that control life-saving pacemakers.

U.S. Rep. Gresham Barrett stressed to those gathered, including many of the 20 or so people the plant currently employs, how important the work there is.

"You save a life every three seconds of every day," he said, referring to the company's line of products, which includes heart valves, pacemakers, implantable cardioverter defibrillators and heart-failure devices. "That's incredible."

Barrett also noted the economic importance of the plant for Pickens County.

"We need more companies like St. Jude," he said. "We need more public-private partnerships. If we're going to rebuild this country, it's going to have to be through the private sector."

The plant produced its first hybrid microelectronic component March 20 and is currently making 500 of the components a week. That number will grow to 2,500 a week by the end of the year, with the capacity to produce even greater quantities in the future, according to spokeswoman Amy Jo Meyer.



Employees at the new St. Jude Medical manufacturing facility perform quality checks on the hybrid microelectronic circuits produced at the plant. (JOHN C. STEVENSON / Staff)

Dan Starks, president, chairman and CEO of St. Jude Medical, praised the Pickens County work force, saying, "The reason we're here is because of your quality as people, your quality as leaders," and that St. Jude Medical "will continue to expand our investment" in the area.

State Rep. B.R. Skelton said St. Jude Medical is one example of the types of companies the area needs to attract.

"This is a high-tech business," he said. "It's the kind of economic development that represents high-paying jobs for our citizens."

Meyer declined to give a salary range for employees at the new plant but said wages "are very competitive for the area and are in line with the wages" at the original St. Jude facility, which makes capacitors for pacemakers.

State Sen. Larry Martin, who also spoke at the plant's ground-breaking ceremony in 2006, said lawmakers need to continue to help businesses like St. Jude find homes in the Palmetto State.

"What we do in Columbia is try to enhance your ability to do business here," he said. "You have the tools. What we want to provide is the environment."

The 60,000-square-foot plant is adjacent to the first St. Jude Medical facility in the Pickens County Commerce Park.