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St. Jude expansion means more jobs in county

By Sandy Foster

What would you do with a second chance at life? A second chance is exactly what St. Jude Medical offers to many people throughout the world with their state-of-the-art pacemakers and defibrillators.

Tuesday, the high-tech company announced that they will indeed expand their operations in Pickens County and offer an additional 100 jobs over the next five years.

The \$15 million capital investment has been about five years in the making, and the new 100,000 square foot facility will be built on 35 acres at the new Pickens County Commerce Park in Liberty.

The new building will house all operations already taking place in two facilities in Pickens and one in Liberty. There will also be room for growth, said Ray Farley, Executive Director of Alliance Pickens.

Farley said that additional efforts to bring even more jobs are already underway.

"I cannot underscore the upside growth potential here," he said.

Everyone who spoke at Tuesday's announcement said this expansion would not be possible without the cooperative effort of Alliance Pickens, County Council and the South Carolina Department of Commerce.

"We are very pleased to expand our presence in South Carolina," said Michael J. Coyle, president of St. Jude Medical's Cardiac Rhythm Management business. "This decision reflects well on the excellent capabilities of the local workforce and is a positive development for communities throughout Pickens County."

St. Jude currently employs nearly 200 people in Pickens and Liberty. The South Carolina operations started in the early 1990's under the name Maven Capacitor and has now grown into a self-supporting, high technology facility, fully staffed with a research and development team.

"We want more South Carolina companies to grow and expand here," said Governor Mark Sanford. "That's why we need to strengthen our business climate to support companies like St. Jude Medical, which is utilizing 'homegrown' technology to develop life-saving devices and create jobs."

County Administrator Alan Ours said that St. Jude Medical is the type of company every community dreams of having.

"St. Jude Medical is an excellent corporate citizen and through their employees' initiative, they have had a positive impact on children and families in Pickens County," he said.

Dr. Tom Strange, Director of Research and Development for the company, said that the basic technology and know-how use to make St. Jude components was developed right here in South Carolina.

"We are proud to continue the tradition. While we looked closely at opportunities in adjacent counties and elsewhere in the country, in our minds, given the generous encouragement from Pickens County Council and Alliance Pickens, there was no other logical home for expansion," he said.

Perhaps S.C. Representative B.R. Skelton summed it up best.

"They could have gone anywhere, but they chose us," he said.

St. Jude Medical is the brain child of William Elias, formerly of Sangamo, Inc., who started to explore the possibility of a flat, medical grade capacitor in the late 1980's. With the help of Ventrivet of Sunnyvale, CA, Elias enlisted talent from throughout the state, including the research group of Philips Components in Columbia. Maven Capacitors was incorporated in 1994, was sold to Ventrivet in January 1996, and then to St. Jude Medical in 1997.

Today, the company offers world class heart therapy devices, including pacemakers, heart valves and catheters.

St. Jude's human resource manager Karen Martin pointed out how community oriented the company's employees are through helping raise money for the Playground of Promise, mentoring students at A. R. Lewis Elementary and delivering hot meals to the homebound through Meals on Wheels. They also contribute to the Red Cross and Pickens County Health Partners.

The company has won numerous awards over the years, including the Innovision Technology Award and SC Manufacturer of the Year.

"We're special; we're St. Jude, and we're so glad to be staying here in Pickens County and building in the Commerce Park," said Martin.

Monday night, county council passed a resolution that will allow St. Jude Medical to pay fees in lieu of taxes in return for their decision to expand in Pickens County. Ground breaking for the new facility will take place in the near future.



Dr. Tom Strange shows off his mud caked shoes from the ground breaking ceremony for the Pickens County Commerce Park.