Aerospace company taking flight in Oconee



JESSICA NELMS | THE JOURNAL

A.I.D. Company Director of Operations Stan Griffis, left, and Operations Manager Ben Bratton stand in front of Oconee County's second spec building in the Oconee Commerce Park.

BY MIKAYLA KREUZBERGER
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A.I.D. bought Oconee County's second spec building in the Oconee Commerce Park last summer and has invested $7 million in its new location.

WESTMINSTER — It won't be long before Oconee County's second spec building in the Oconee Commerce Park is teeming with the manufacturing of aerospace control rods.

A.I.D. Company Director of Operations Stan Griffis said the company, which builds fixed-wing airplane and helicopter control rods for airplane manufacturers and the U.S. military, is weeks away from relocating its Clayton, Ga., facility to its new home on Highway 11.

David Stokes, the county's community development director, approved A.I.D.'s certification of occupancy on Tuesday.

"They can move in when they're ready," he said. "We have a review process and we check up with them to see if they need anything. Now that everything is done for the building, they can come to us about any questions they have about future expansions and the like."

Griffis said company officials are hoping to relocate CNC (computer numerical control) machines and operations by late June or early July.

"We will be fully operational by October," he said. "That's when the Clayton facility will close.

"Trying to maneuver through a 15 percent growth in the company and move an entire facility without entirely stopping production has its challenges."

A.I.D. bought the county's spec building last summer and has invested $7 million in its new location – in addition to creating office space for 28 employees, it added 15,000 square feet to the original shell for specific manufacturing processes, such as chemical processing and heat treating aluminum rods with a 28-feet tall, above-ground, heat-treating furnace.

Griffis said along with purchasing the new furnace, A.I.D.'s investment also includes several new CNC machines over the next several years.

"Currently, A.I.D. produces roughly 9,000 special-order control rods each year," Griffis said. "This facility has the capabilities to produce three times as many."

Expansion was a dominant factor that drew A.I.D. to the county's spec building, but another deciding factor was the county's impressive labor core.

"It's a very business friendly environment. There are partnerships with Clemson University, Tri-County Technical College and even with the local school systems," he said. "We are up to 68 employees right now at the Clayton plant, and we've committed to hiring up to 75 within the next five years."

Of those 68, 15 employees are South Carolina residents hired since A.I.D. purchased the Oconee facility. Attrition is expected, but many employees will either commute or make the move themselves.

Griffis said A.I.D. plans to hold a job fair within the next month, at which the company would look to hire between eight and 10 employees.

A formal announcement with listed shop floor positions is ex-

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pected to be posted on the S.C. Works website, www.worklinkweb.com/sc-works.php, soon.

"Our primary employees are CNC machinists, but we hire engineers and those with assembly experience, too," he said.

Russell Johnson, of Oconee's Economic Development Commission (EDC), said the EDC helped facilitate A.I.D.'s move to Oconee County.

"It's huge," Johnson said. "The jobs they plan to create and the capital investment on the county's tax rolls ... we can't get them here fast enough."

Johnson said the EDC is currently working to complete the Echo Hills Commerce Park further north on Highway 11.

"The rain has slowed the project tremendously – it's rained 30 inches since we began construction in December. But, we're already moving on to specific projects within Echo Hills."

A.I.D. Company is a subsidiary of global company RBC Bearings. For information, visit www.rbcbearings.com.

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