Breaking ground



Crews are hard at work on four new construction or expansion projects at the Pickens County Commerce Park.
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Record 4 projects taking shape at Pickens County Commerce Park

BY GREG OLIVER
THE JOURNAL

PICKENS COUNTY — Alliance Pickens executive director Ray Farley is currently experiencing something he's never witnessed in his 15 years on the job — four construction or expansion projects taking place simultaneously at the Pickens County Commerce Park.

Reliable Automatic Sprinkler Co. Inc., which became the first occupant of the park when it relocated from Elmsford, N.Y., to Pickens County in 2006, is adding another 150,000 square feet to its existing facility. The project will bring a capital investment of $23.1 million and 100 new jobs to the county.

"They will have a 450-car parking lot and a truck access road where trucks can enter the back of the buildings," Farley said. "There will also be room for a 100,000 or so square foot building for future growth."

Site work for the Reliable expansion project began three weeks ago. Construction is set to be completed sometime in the summer of 2017.

Farley said era-contact USA, a German based global manufacturing leader of electrical railway couplings, is launching its North American manufacturing headquarters at the commerce park. The new development will bring $3.6 million in investment and led to the creation of 45 new jobs.

The initial building phase will consist of approximately 38,000 square feet and Farley said a building pad would be constructed to extend to some

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110,000-120,000 square feet. The economic development director said site work is completed.

"They're now preparing to construct the building," he said.

St. Jude Medical, which also broke ground at the commerce park in 2004, has completed its 60,000-square-foot expansion. Farley said the project is now in the landscaping phase.

The $12 million investment will add 64 new jobs to Pickens County.

Finally, Michigan-based JR Automation Technologies LLC, a global leader in custom automation solutions, has invested $5 million in a new state-of-the-art 50,000-square-foot facility in the commerce park. Since arriving in Pickens County in 2011, the company has been leasing a 21,000-square-foot facility in Pickens.

Farley said multiple pieces of equipment are being used to cut into the dirt and fill in where needed. The area where the expansion is taking place has been raised 15 feet.

"It used to be a ravine and head of a deeper ravine," Farley said. "This gives you an idea of how they've shaped this land."

While drought conditions have enabled construction to proceed on schedule, Farley said some rain would be nice to compact the dirt on site.

"Compaction is a challenge, because a certain amount of moisture is needed," he said, adding that machinery known as a sheepsfoot is able to compact the dirt vertically, as well as horizontally.

An official is also on site to ensure the compaction is meeting specifications to prevent the ground from "settling." Farley also said some rock was discovered during the dirt removal process — only the second time that has occurred with all the construction and expansion projects taking place at the park. Engineers are on site to determine how best to remove the rock.

The Alliance Pickens executive director said he is excited to see the work taking place due to the efforts of "a lot of dedicated people." There are currently eight businesses located on approximately 250 acres of the park.

Farley estimates that, after grading, there is approximately 40 acres remaining at the commerce park that can still be developed. But he added that, due to steep hills and ravines, another 15 to 25 acres exist that are unsuitable for development.

Although he recognizes and hopes the day will come when the commerce park is completely filled to capacity, Farley said he is fortunate to work for a forward-thinking County Council that has been aware of that and making preparations.

"Council has been leading and knew we would ultimately outgrow the park," Farley said. "They've been entertaining options for future growth."

The Alliance Pickens leader said he is pleased with the way council has led in the area of workforce development, working to develop "a skilled, trained workforce for industry."

"We're taking care of these world-class companies in the most important fashion — their labor," Farley said. "We have a great place for them to invest in and this park helps them recruit good talent to work for them. We're providing them with a pipeline of technical talent out of our area. They don't need to recruit statewide or headhunt around the Midwest — we have strong technical programs in K-12, technical high school and Tri-County Technical College and Clemson University.

"The New York Times, Forbes magazines and other publications have spread the word of what we're doing in Pickens County relative to developing a skilled STEM manufacturing workforce."

Farley said there are a combined 1,600 employees at the commerce park, sitting on 950,000 square feet of industrial space or "job creative space."

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