Covidien deal offers 'slight opportunity' for Seneca plant

BY NORMAN CANNADA
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SENECA — Although it is too early to know yet, a local official said plans announced this week for the Minnesota-based company Medtronic to purchase Covidien provide a "slight opportunity" of a discussion that could keep Covidien's plant in Seneca open.

Richard Blackwell, executive director of the Oconee Economic Alliance, said Wednesday he has talked to representatives with U.S. Rep. Jeff Duncan's office to get help in contacting Medtronics officials and has reached out to company officials in the wake of this week's announcement.

"Really and truly, this is so fresh on both sides — Medtronic and Covidien — that they don't know yet," Blackwell said. "Is there a chance? There is a slight opportunity to have a discussion to try to reverse that decision, but we may not know for a few more weeks or months down the road.

"All we can do is explore the opportunity, and that's what we're doing right now."

Covidien announced plans in late 2012 to close its plant on S.C. Highway 28 near Seneca and move those jobs to Costa Rica. The plant, which had about 595 employees at the time of the announcement, is down to about 100 employees today, with "limited production" at the Seneca plant, according to Blackwell.

Duncan spokesman Al-

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len Klump said Blackwell has received some help with contacting senior officials with the company and the congressman's office will continue to help in any way it can.

Blackwell said he will continue to work on efforts to keep the plant open until he learns what plans, if any, Medtronic has for the Seneca property.

"(The merger announcement) did open up a little bit of a door, because Medtronic has been trying to get down to South Carolina as far as having a facility, but I don't know what that means," he said. "If they still go forward with moving that business out to Costa Rica, Medtronic could bring another business to that facility, because the company owns that asset."

'a little bit of a door'

The deal announced earlier this week still has to go through the regulatory process, but Blackwell said it has already received agreement from both sides and will likely get final approval.

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Seneca's Covidien plant is scheduled to close completely in 2015.

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