Flat wire maker announces $5M Oconee deal

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WESTMINSTER — Local officials joined Gov. Nikki Haley and others in applauding a Monday announcement by Ulbrich Precision Flat Wire, Inc., of its plans to make a $5 million expansion in Oconee County.

A company spokesman credited an incentive package worked out with county officials as the key to its decision to expand its local manufacturing plant.

"These incentives are critical in our ability to grow and remain competitive in a global economy," Ulbrich executive Dan Day said.

Ulbrich is investing at least $5 million over the next five years to expand its Westminster operations. The company, a division of Ulbrich Stainless Steels and Special Metals, Inc., is expected to begin its expansion in the spring of 2014. Plans call for the company to increase its manufacturing square footage at the existing plant and also add precision rolling equipment to meet increasing demands in key markets.

Ulbrich products are used by industries in the area of aerospace, automotive, energy, medical, chemical processing and electronics.

In return for Ulbrich's investment, the company will see its property tax rate reduced from 10 percent to 6 percent under a fee-in-lieu-of-tax agreement approved by Oconee County Council in October.

County Council Chairman Joel Thrift said Ulbrich could have expanded its business anywhere in the world, but chose Oconee because of its "business-friendly climate and dynamic workforce."

"On behalf of Oconee County, we are excited that Ulbrich has committed to invest and expand within our community," Thrift added.

The company has about 100 employees in Oconee.

Westminster City Administrator David Smith said the city sells water to the company, which is located at 692 Plant Road outside city limits.

"It's great for the city residents who work at the plant and don't have to drive far to get to work," Smith said.

When the incentive package was approved in October, Oconee Economic Development Director Richard Blackwell said it was the county's first such agreement with Ulbrich.

"They've been ramping up, and we're excited about that," Blackwell said.

Haley said in Columbia Monday that the announcement is one more indication that companies worldwide "are seeing South Carolina as the right place to do business."

"It's always exciting to see a company grow in one of the state's rural areas," the governor said. "We celebrate (Ulbrich's) decision to expand their operations in Oconee County."

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