GE Aviation adding jobs, fueling optimism



HEIDI HEILBRUNN / Staff

General Electric employees work at the new GE Aviation building located at The Matrix, an industrial park on U.S. 25.

Hiring by several manufacturers supports turnaround

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Employment continues to grow at General Electric Co.'s jet-engine parts plant south of Greenville in what one economist said is another sign of a strengthening manufacturing sector in South Carolina.

GE Aviation said Monday it would add 100 jobs over the next three years at its new factory in The Matrix industrial park along U.S. 25 for a total of 250.

The GE jobs and hiring by other manufacturers could signal better times ahead for the South Carolina economy, said Don Schunk, an economist at Coastal Carolina University in Conway.

"Any one expansion in and of itself doesn't solve our problems, but when you start to add up some of

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SEE THE GE PLANT

See a gallery of images from Electric Co.'s jet-engine parts plant at:

GE Aviation

Primary products; jet engines and parts for commercial and military aircraft.

- Headquarters: Cincinnati, Ohio
- 2007 Revenues: $16.8 Billion
- Total Worldwide Employment: 39,000
- More than 50 locations worldwide.



SUZIE RIDDLE / Staff

JOBS

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the positive announcements we've had in the last six months in manufacturing across the state, I think you can start to feel a little bit more optimistic," Schunk said.

The good news of late includes hiring by Michelin North America Inc. and BMW Manufacturing Co. in the Upstate, the addition of 500 jobs by Caterpillar Inc. in Newberry, and a new aircraft assembly plant under construction by The Boeing Co. in North Charleston.

If the positive trend continues, manufacturing employment in South Carolina might actually grow — or at least stabilize — after shrinking for a decade, Schunk said.

"If we can manage that, it'll do wonders for the state's overall economy over the next five years," he said.

The jet-engine parts plant began as a small operation six years ago at a different GE factory in Greenville that makes electricity-generating turbines.

Now housed in its own 150,000-square-foot building at The Matrix, the GE Aviation factory plans to add 100 workers and $30 million worth of machinery over the next three years, plant manager Brad Brougher said Monday following a tour with U.S. Sen. Jim DeMint.

The GE Aviation plant also supports employment at the Honeywell Aerospace factory in Greer by sending 1,500 parts a week there to get special coatings, Brougher said.

Tamra Mathias of Greenville said she was delighted to be hired as a machine operator at the GE Aviation plant two weeks ago after two and a half years on a staffing agency's payroll with no benefits.

The 39-year-old transplant from Illinois now has GE's full benefits package and the chance to make approximately $30 an hour over the next several months, said Torrey Becote, human resources manager at the jet-engine parts plant.

"I love it," Mathias said. "It's a great opportunity, and I'm just thankful that I have the opportunity to be there."

DeMint told *The Greenville News* that he has been working behind the scenes to recruit other jobs and expects more good news soon.

"I think over the next few weeks you're going to see some other big announcements of new companies moving here to the Upstate," the senator from Greenville said without elaborating.

South Carolina's unemployment rate continued at 12.5 percent in February, according to the latest data available from the state Employment Security Commission.