'Doing things right'



U.S Senator Lindsey Graham, center, speaks with BorgWarner president and CEO James Verrier, left, and Stefan Demmerle, BorgWarner's vice president and president and general Manager of TorqTransfer Systems, on Friday at the Seneca plant.

JESSICA NELMS | THE JOURNAL

Government, BorgWarner, Toyota officials celebrate partnership

BY JOSIE RABBITT
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Employees of BorgWarner sat in their red shirts alongside members of Oconee County City Council and other government officials as BorgWarner and Toyota executives celebrated a partnership between the two companies.

The crowd gathered Friday for a Toyota business launch event at BorgWarner's Seneca plant to celebrate the BorgWarner-Toyota partnership, in which the local plant is producing transfer cases for Toyota.

"What the people at the Seneca plant are producing is the global benchmark for this Toyota transfer case," Toyota senior vice president Chris Nielson said. "They've lived up to every ounce of trust we've placed in them."

U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, a Seneca native, praised the partnership.

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RIGHT: 'A huge boost to the community'

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"Toyota is a premier company," Graham said. "The first time they decide to take their line out of Japan, they choose Seneca. That says a lot about the people of Seneca and the BorgWarner family."

In the last five years, BorgWarner has invested $60 million and provided more than 500 jobs in the community, including a $5 million investment with more than 100 new jobs last year.

"The facility here has been a huge boost to the community," Oconee County administrator Scott Moulder said. "The facility has been here since 1995 and has grown to 600 employees. Thanks to companies like BorgWarner, the county has seen positive growth since the recession. We are one of a few counties that has seen such positivity, and because of the manufacturing and investing, we touch your wallets the third least in the state."

BorgWarner broke ground on the Seneca plant in 1995 with only 34 employees.

"It's a wonderful story," BorgWarner president and CEO James Verrier said. "We made less than $1 billion in sales back when we first started and did almost no business in South Carolina. Now we are at $7.5 billion in sales and have created more than 1,000 jobs for South Carolinians. We aren't stopping here. In 2020, we hope to be at $15 billion in sales, and we're going to achieve that while sticking to the same principles that have founded us. We will remain true."

The transfer case launch with Toyota created even more jobs, as 150 more South Carolinians were employed by BorgWarner to produce "a successfully launched transfer case," according to Nielson.

"Not often does one get to celebrate such an incredible launch at such a great plant in such a great state," Verrier said. "I visit a lot of plants, but South Carolina is a little different. South Carolina just gets manufacturing."

South Carolina Secretary of Commerce Bobby Hitt agreed.

"We're doing things right," Hitt said. "We're building a diversified economy with a can-do impact on the world."

The transfer case was challenging for BorgWarner employees, according to Stefan Demmerle, BorgWarner's vice president and president and general manager of TorqTransfer Systems.

"What did it take to make this transfer case a success?" Demmerle asked. "It's been a long nine years. In 2005, BorgWarner started collaborating with Toyota. As the relationship grew closer, trust was built. In 2011, we gained a development contract with Toyota. In 2012, we got their production contract. We've given 470 jobs to the community with this, and we'd like to continue that progression."

"We're on a roll in this community," Graham said. "We've got great workers — people that show up on time. The finest tech schools in the country are right down the road. For companies like BorgWarner and Toyota, we are the ace in the hole. We'd like to keep it that way. Those who live here, we are blessed."

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