Itron jobs to come sooner

Official says company will hire 150 additional workers in next six months

BY CARLOS GALARZA
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WALHALLA — A spokesman for the West Union plant that makes electricity meters said the facility is quickly becoming an important piece in the company's global expansion.

Itron Comptroller Kenneth Ambory told the Oconee County Council this week the West Union manufacturing facility is ramping up production of the company's Smart Meter line of products.

Ambory said the increase in production will make it possible for Itron to hire 150 new employees in Oconee County in the next six months.

The hiring forecast surpasses the projection recently given by county officials when council approved a new fee-in-lieu of tax agreement with Itron in which the company promises to invest $31 million over the next five years. At the time, county officials said the deal would bring 50 to 150 new jobs over five years.

Now, Ambory is saying the jobs will come sooner rather than later.

The new tax deal with Itron is an extension of a previous fee-in-lieu of tax agreement. Although it called for the company to invest $30 million over five years, Itron sped through the production expansion in about two years.

"We spent every penny on smart meters," Ambory said.

Itron held an open house at its West Union plant in August to unveil its new

rather than later

automation system. According to a company statement, the new manufacturing production technique in place at the Oconee facility offers improvements in productivity and strengthens the competitive position of the business.

"This facility will make half a billion dollars in revenues," Ambory said.

Itron's West Union facility is the third-largest employer in Oconee with approximately 600 full- and part-time employees. The 317,000 square-foot Oconee plant and offices house research and development, engineering, product marketing and production of several lines of electricity meters.

Council members were impressed with Ambory's presentation.

"Thanks for the good news," Council Chairman Reg Dexter said.

Councilman Joel Thrift added: "Thanks for being in Oconee County."

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