# Company announces $23.1M Pickens County expansion




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**Reliable Automatic Sprinkler Co. is expanding its Liberty operations to create 100 new jobs, bringing its total employment to 700. Bill Kirkpatrick, Reliable vice president for manufacturing, goes over renderings of the expansion project.**

# Reliable Sprinkler growth will lead to 100 new jobs

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When the construction was finished on Reliable Automatic Sprinkler Co.'s 302,000-square-foot Pickens County plant in 2003, owners Kevin, F.J. and Michael Fee drove their cars into the empty building and started popping wheelies and cutting donuts.

They were happy to have a new home for their fire sprinkler manufacturing business, after moving from cramped quarters in Mount Vernon, New York.

Then reality hit.

"I looked at my brother and I said, what are we thinking about?" Kevin Fee said Thursday.

That was a lot of space to try to fill with equipment and workers.

In the 12 years and one day since they broke ground on the facility and became the first tenant of the Pickens County Commerce Park, they have found themselves cramped for space again.

This time, instead of moving to another state, they're expanding their existing plant by another 150,000 square feet, investing $23.1 million and creating 100 jobs in the process.

"Today, they have a tremendous problem, a great opportunity for us, because they are bursting at the seams," Pickens County Council Chairman Jennifer Willis said. "And we are here to support them."

The expansion was made possible by a 32-acre land grant approved by County Council moments before the project was announced. The land grant nearly doubles the size of Reliable's footprint.

It was the largest economic development announcement, by square footage, in Pickens County since the company announced 15 years ago that it would move to the commerce park off U.S. 123 near Liberty.

The expansion will take 12-14 months to complete, and the new facility is expected to be fully operational by January 2018, according to Kevin Fee, the company's president and CEO.

"That extra piece of land is critical for our growth and development," Fee said.

The council also approved a fee in lieu of taxes agreement with the company.

Fee said the expansion "guarantees" the company's growth, because demand for fire sprinklers continues to grow as new buildings are built. Reliable, which sells about 20 percent of its product in international markets, is looking to add several new product lines with its expansion, he said.

Pickens County residents make up about 75 percent of the plant's workforce, he said, crediting the quality of workers as well as the support of the county in giving Reliable the best "home field advantage" among its competitors.

Jon Baggett of the state Department of Commerce said his department has announced more than 580 economic development projects since 2011. This is the second one during that time in Pickens County, the first since 2013.

"By staying here in Pickens, Reliable has made a statement that they are committed to Pickens County and the state of South Carolina," Baggett said. "And we look forward to continuing our longstanding thriving relationship with Reliable."

No other state officials were at the announcement at the offices of Alliance Pickens, the county's economic development arm, but Gov. Nikki Haley sent a statement.

"It's always exciting to see one of our very own companies find success and continue to invest in our state and its people," she said. "Reliable Automatic Sprinkler Co.'s $23 million investment, and the 100 jobs it will create in Pickens County, speaks volumes about the state of manufacturing in South Carolina and the world-class workforce present in every part of our state."