SKY-HIGH DREAMS COME TRUE



Thousands gather for the Boeing 787 Dreamliner roll-out ceremony at Boeing's North Charleston assembly plant. The more fuel-efficient jet is meant for point-to-point, long-haul flights, such as direct from Charleston to Munich or Tokyo to Boston. C.ALUKA BERRY/CABERRY@THESTATE.COM

Aerospace giant Boeing rolls out the first 787 Dreamliner built at its new South Carolina plant

By Jeff Wilkinson
The State

NORTH CHARLESTON—Boeing rolled out the first large commercial aircraft ever built in the South on Friday—its new South Carolina-built 787 Dreamliner passenger jet.

In an afternoon ceremony that was part corporate pep rally and part rock concert, the Chicago-headquartered company rolled the new plane onto the steamy tarmac of its new 2.5 million-square-foot assembly plant here, amid fireworks and sonic blasts of Foo Fighters and Zombie Nation.

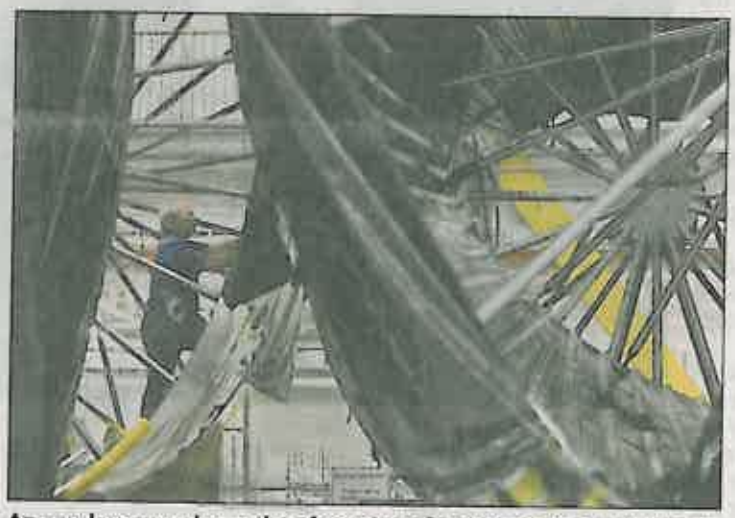
A drum line from Burke High School led all 6,000 employees of the plant onto the field, where they surrounded hundreds of seated dignitaries, including former Gov. Mark Sanford, Speaker of the House Bobby Harrell, Lt. Gov. Glenn McConnell and others.

On cue, the throng, exhorted by Boeing vice president and general manager South Carolina Jack Jones, chanted "We build jets! We build jets!"

"Building Dreams" was the theme of the day, and Gov. Nikki Haley took the podium to the power chords of Aerosmith's "Dream On."

"We build cars," she said. "We build tires. And now we build dreams. Big mack-daddy 787 dreams."

The first plane is on its way to Air India, and the point was not lost on Haley, who is of Indian descent.



An employee works on the aft section of a Boeing 787 Dreamliner in North Charleston on Friday. GRACE BEAHM/POSTANDCOURIER.COM

The nose of the all-white, $193.5 million aircraft was emblazoned with "Proudly made in South Carolina" and bore the state's symbols of palmetto tree and crescent.

"The reason we're here is because of the great political leadership in this state," said Jim Albaugh, chief executive of Boeing Commercial Airplanes, "and the great workforce."

The day culminates three years of drama, beginning with the announcement in 2009, hailed among the top national economic development deals of the year.

It is the first plant the company has built outside of its West Coast facilities since World War II. And the announcement that a production facility would be built in right-to-work South Carolina touched off a battle between the company and the National Labor Relations Board, a battle the company won.

U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., after joking that his predecessor, the late Sen. Strom Thurmond, had failed to get the Wright Brothers to come to South Carolina, chided the labor board in his remarks. It "just couldn't make it here today" for the ceremony, he said.

Earlier in the day, the company gave about three dozen journalists guided tours of the cavernous and impeccably tidy plant.

One of those employees was Brian Horn, 44, of Birmingham,

See BOEING, Page 3A



Boeing rolled out the 787 Dreamliner — the first large commercial aircraft ever built in the South — at its new assembly plant in North Charleston. EROY BURNELL/POSTANDCOURIER.COM

BOEING

Continued from Page 1A

Ala. Horn, now of Mount Pleasant, had lost his job at an aircraft maintenance firm in Alabama because of the recession. He "applied and was just persistent," he said. "I got picked up and have enjoyed it ever since. It's the cleanest place I've ever worked."

The North Charleston plant is expected to produce 3.5 Dreamliners a month when at full capacity at the end of 2013.

The state-of-the-art passenger jets are made of 50 percent light composite material that makes the planes cheaper to fly, Jones said.

So far, the company has received 854 orders for the planes from 59 airlines around the world. The four planes now being assembled here are slated for Air India. The planes sell for $193.5 million.

Jones called the planes the company's "fastest-selling ... ever."

Work on the estimated $750 million facility began in April 2013 and took 13 months to complete, said Marco Cavazzoni, Boeing's South Carolina vice president and general manager for final assembly.



Thousands of employees and several hundred guests get a close up view of the Dreamliner. G BEAHM/POSTANDCOURIER.COM

He wouldn't confirm the construction price, but said that 80 percent of construction dollars went to South Carolina companies.

The plant is eco-friendly; its roof boasts the largest solar array in the Southeast. The panels, which provide 20 percent of the plant's power, cover an area the size of 11 football fields. The plant also sends no waste to landfills, even recycling food scraps from its dining facility. The plant assembles the planes from parts produced around the world. Many of the components are flown in on an oversized Dreamlifter cargo plane.

Unlike the 747, the more fuel-efficient Dreamliner is intended for point-to-point, long-haul flights, such as direct from Charleston to Munich or Tokyo to Boston, rather than from hub to hub. That saves the passengers the added time of flying to and from international hubs such as Atlanta or Philadelphia to reach their destinations. "It's a game-changer," Jones said.