

JESSICA NELMS | THE JOURNAL

U.S. Engine Valve product technician Shannon Hall works on a machine at the company's Westminster plant on Thursday, the same day officials announced an expansion of the plant that is expected to bring at least 125 new jobs to Oconee County.

Westminster plant announces $29.5M investment, 125 new jobs

BY NORMAN CANNADA
THE JOURNAL

WESTMINSTER — U.S. Engine Valve announced a $29.5 million expansion investment to its Oconee County plant Thursday that officials say will add at least 125 new jobs to the local economy.

Plant manager Bobby Dover said the expansion includes a 38,400-square-foot building which will house a new line of equipment for the company's North American customers at the S.C. Highway 11 location. The company supplies valves for vehicles that help increase fuel economy and improve overall efficiency and performance, according to a statement released by the South Carolina Department of Commerce.

"I think it's really great for the county," Dover said. "We're obviously adding the jobs. We're providing the local construction company with quite a bit of business here as we're doing the expansion. I counted three cement trucks rolling through (Thursday) morning. We're really pulling from a lot of the service industry locally to help us out with the expansion. They are just helping us as we grow until we get our positions filled."

Dover said the hiring has already begun, but more positions — especially those in technical areas — are still being filled.

"We have been doing the job fairs," he said. "Actually, we

'(The expansion) demonstrates to the world we have the labor force, a positive business climate and an excellent partnership with our technical school to satisfy the needs of industry.'

Joel Thrift
Oconee County Council Chairman

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FUTURE: Plant expansion should be complete by April

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have been looking for some of the maintenance technicians for some time, for several months. We're definitely wanting to get as many of these technical positions — the maintenance technicians and engineering technicians — filled as quickly as possible to help us bring a lot of the new equipment in."

Once the jobs are filled, Dover said U.S. Engine Valve will have 455-460 employees at the Westminster plant. The addition will bring the plant to more than 170,000 square feet of space. The new facility is expected to be completed in April.

"It is a very exciting time for us, because we're investing not only in the new building and new equipment, but also we've got new technology that is going to help take us into the future with a lot of the new engines that our customers are bringing online," Dover said. "This investment to support growth in our North American valve business is great for our customers, employees and the communities where we live and work."

Dover said economic development incentives from Oconee County and the State of South Carolina were key ingredients to the expansion coming to Westminster, along with the local plant's reputation for quality.

Oconee Economic Alliance executive director Richard Blackwell said U.S. Engine Valve received state incentives that involved both Job Development Credits and Job Tax Credits. The company also received a state grant for the project and ReadySC assistance. Locally, Blackwell said the project received property tax abatements associated with the square footage addition and the equipment upgrade. He said county officials have been working with U.S. Engine Valve for about a year.

"We're extremely excited to be a part of this expansion for this company's growth," Blackwell said. "We're happy it occurred here. It's been a long process. We're very happy to get it over the finish line. U.S. Engine Valve has been a great corporate citizen here for many years, and it is exciting to see them continue to grow."

Oconee Council Chairman Joel Thrift, who represents the Westminster area, said the announcement sends a message about the business climate in the county.

"It's exciting to see this global company expand its footprint in Oconee County," Thrift said. "This demonstrates to the world we have the labor force, a positive business climate and an excellent partnership with our technical school to satisfy the needs of industry."

ncannada@upstatetoday.com | (864) 973-6684
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