

\$19.4M Koyo expansion to create 56 new jobs



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JTEKT North America is investing \$19.4 million in an expansion of the Koyo Bearings production facility in Oconee County. The expansion will create 56 jobs and add 18,000 square feet to the 173,000-square-foot plant.

Announcement results of 'several months' of work

BY JUSTIN LEE CAMPBELL
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WEST UNION — Oconee County will get nearly 60 new jobs with a planned expansion of auto part supplier Koyo Bearings — an investment worth more than \$19 million.

JTEKT North America announced Thursday the company is investing \$19.4 million to

expand the Koyo Bearings production facility in West Union, according to a S.C. Department of Commerce news release. The expansion will create 56 jobs.

Oconee Economic Alliance executive director Richard Blackwell said the alliance worked with JTEKT for “several months” to make the investment happen.

“It is very encouraging to

see JTEKT Koyo continue to grow, continue to invest in our community,” he said.

The expansion adds 18,000 square feet to the 173,000-square-foot plant that JTEKT Group bought in 2010, according to the news release. Located on Torrington Road, Koyo makes bearings and

EXPANSION: News a 'great testament' to Oconee workforce

FROM PAGE A1

steering systems for major automotive manufacturers.

Blackwell said up to 70 percent of vehicles in the market have a part made at Koyo in Oconee County.

Koyo engineering facilities manager Shawn Grimm said in the news release the two-year investment will improve equipment, processes and the shop floor layout.

"Koyo's dedication to continuously improving our manufacturing processes shows we are a consistent employer of choice within Oconee County," Grimm said. "We are proud of our location and proud to be a part of this great area."

State Sen. Thomas Alexander, R-Walhalla, said the expansion is a "great testament" to the workforce in Oconee.

"There's no doubt in my mind that without the quality of dedicated employees (at Koyo), this expansion wouldn't be happening," Alexander said.

JTEKT employs more than 5,400 people at 14 plants in North America, according to the release. Blackwell said the West Union plant has more than 600 employees now.

The Oconee County Chamber of Commerce will host a ribbon cutting with Koyo staff to celebrate the expansion at the plant Monday morning.

Chamber executive

director Vanessa Penton said employees have the opportunity to "move up the ladder" at Koyo.

"By offering the training, good pay and benefits and the 'we're-a-team' approach that Koyo offers their employees, people feel like it's not just a job, but a career that is supported with a sense of family and community support," she said.

The ribbon-cutting ceremony is scheduled for 8:30 a.m. Monday at 430 Torrington Road in West Union.

JTEKT's announcement came one day after Ford Motor Company announced on its website production of F-150 and Super Duty pickup trucks will resume today and Monday after a fire at a Michigan plant disrupted the supply chain for more than a week.

The announcement was welcome news to auto part supplier BorgWarner in Seneca, which makes transfer cases for Ford.

Blackwell said a goal for the alliance is to diversify the job market to keep the economy stable in the event of something worse than a temporary supply chain disruption.

"With the goal of being diverse is the goal to build an economic base that is sustainable and survives the ups and downs of a local economy," Blackwell said.