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Energizer exec aims to grow plant

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The new manufacturing line at the former Hawaiian Tropic plant in Ormond Beach should begin operation by next fall, but hiring workers to run it should start sooner than that.

So says Mischelle Romesberg, operations technology leader for liquid products at Energizer Personal Care, whose Playtex Manufacturing plant is at 1190 N. U.S. Highway 1.

Romesberg, the plant's manager from March 2009 until getting promoted in July 2013, said she finds it "exciting for the plant to add a new production line."

That's because it not only means more local jobs — the company has pledged to create at least 21 over three years — and a \$9 million capital investment, but also because it could lead to further expansion of the plant if the new production line delivers the cost-savings the company is seeking, Romesberg said.

The new manufacturing facilities will give the plant the capability to produce aerosol products, starting with spray-on versions of Energizer's Hawaiian Tropic and Banana Boat suncare products, she said.

The plant also produces liquid versions of Energizer's Edge and Skintimates shaving creams, but not the gel versions that come in cans, at least not yet, she said.

Energizer decided to install the new manufacturing facilities here after also considering its plants in other parts of the country.

What tipped the scales in favor of Ormond Beach, Romesberg said, were the economic incentives recently approved by the city and state, much of it contingent on the company making good on its pledge to create jobs that will pay an average annual wage of \$39,000.

PEAK SEASON UNDERWAY

The plant employs 199 full-time workers year-round, but adds seasonal workers, at times more than 100 a day, during peak production season for suncare products, which Romesberg said runs from October through March.

Romesberg said the company has been outsourcing production of its Hawaiian Tropic and Banana Boat aerosol suncare products to contract manufacturers.

CLOSE CALL

Energizer's decision is a victory for the city, which came close to losing the plant after the home-grown Hawaiian Tropic company was sold in May 2007 to Playtex Corp., maker of the then-rival Banana Boat suncare line. Playtex had been outsourcing production of Banana Boat and was expected to do likewise with Hawaiian Tropic.

That's when Joe Mannarino, Ormond Beach economic development director, sprang into action.

“I asked them to compare the cost benefits of outsourcing versus manufacturing in Ormond Beach,” recalled Mannarino, who after several months finally got a response from the Playtex official who had listened to his pitch. The official had both “good news and bad news,” Mannarino said.

The good: Playtex officials agreed it made more sense to keep the Ormond Beach plant. The bad: Playtex was being acquired by Energizer, which meant the evaluation process would need to start over again.

Energizer kept the plant.

“We have a great relationship, not only with Joe but also the rest of the city,” Romesberg said, adding: “If I’m successful, I want to keep growing the plant.”

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