

The Marion Star

Manufacturers drive employment in Marion

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Scarlett Goodwin, right, packages bags of snacks coming off one of the production lines at Wyandot Inc. Wyandot added 100 jobs over the past two years, Rex Parrott, president and chief operating officer, said. (Photo: Bill Sinden/The Marion Star)

MARION – Manufacturers employ nearly one-fourth of Marion County’s working population, according to Columbus 2020 statistics in 2013.

The fortunes of companies such as Wyandot Inc., Nucor Steel Marion Inc. and Morral Companies LLC can have a significant impact on the livelihoods of individuals and the Marion County economy.

All three have added employees in recent years, some in recent months, as the area’s manufacturing base looks forward to continued economic recovery.

Therr Nowlin, Nucor Steel Marion general manager, said his steel mill is “looking for some specific positions,” but did most of its hiring last year. “The last half of 2014 we went through a

pretty big hiring spurt, going from 240 employees to 270 employees. We're adding additional capacity and more shifts into the mill this year."

Wyandot adding staff

Wyandot Inc. was to start eight to 10 people in mid-March as the snack food manufacturer nears the end of a phase that included the hiring of about 100 employees over the past two years, raising its work roster to about 400, Rex Parrott, Wyandot president and chief operating officer, said.

In 2014, at its 1592 Columbus-Sandusky Road N. site just off Ohio 309, Morral Companies added a 11,000-ton capacity warehouse for its dry fertilizer, doubled the size of its bag warehouse, added an office and added two robotic lines for bagging lawn fertilizer and ice melter, investing "quite a bit more" than \$3 million in the project, Daryl Gates, president and CEO, said.

Gates said the 51-year-old company, which manufactures fertilizer, plant protection products, turf products and ice melters plans to complete a similar upgrade of its plant in Morral over the next three years.

"Business has been good," he said. "The agriculture business many times runs counter-cyclical" to the general economy. "Unfortunately we're seeing commodity prices come down a little bit. Things will be tougher for farmers over the next couple years."

Morral Companies invests

But Morral Companies will continue to invest in its Marion County facilities because they're "close to a big portion of the United States, and the good transportation systems, rail and roads," he said. "Our wholesale business has been very good." In addition, the company has had strong business with farmers, "and some of the better farm ground in the state of Ohio and certainly some of the better farmers around the state" are nearby. "It's been very good for us, as well as the local farmers."

"We're very committed to the long term," he said. "Obviously, we've been here 50 years. Hopefully, we'll be here 50 years from now. Our job is to sustain the business for the next generation."

Wyandot began operating as a grain popcorn company in 1936, becoming involved in snack food about 1950, Parrott said, like Gates citing market proximity as a key factor in the business locating in Marion County.

"We are in a perfect locations as is the case in terms of a lot of businesses ability to get product to customers, efficiency is critical," he said. "We're a one-day truck ride to 60 percent of the U.S. (market)."

“I think the other reason it works well here is that Ohioans here and in Marion in general have a great work ethic,” he said. “I knew that before I came to Wyandot. ... Productivity here in Marion was always among the highest, so I think that serves us well.”

Being a contract manufacturer with several new potential customers in “our sales pipeline,” Wyandot is poised to grow further. “We need to be on alert and manage that process.”

Nucor optimistic on growth

When Nucor purchased Marion Steel at 912 Cheney Ave. in 2005, the Charlotte, North Carolina-based company did so as a strategic move, Nowlin said.

“The acquisition came during a time period of overall industry consolidation and during that consolidation period, Nucor being the strongest U.S. steel producer was looking to grow strategically in areas where we wanted to expand our footprint. The Marion facility fit into that strategic growth plan.”

He said highway products was a “new segment for our business,” and the Marion facility fit comfortably into the company’s “first dive” into rebar and rebar fabrication in conjunction with “downstream purchases.” With the acquisition of the Marion plant Nucor became involved in raw materials and a “vertical strategy” to produce rebar for fabricators of highway products.

“We’re cautiously optimistic” that Nucor Steel Marion’s production will grow.

“It’s a very global market now, so any hiccups in China or Europe could send shock waves into the U.S. economic engine, but our anticipation right now is that the U.S. economy will continue to heal and continue to grow.” Generally economic growth leads to a growth in the demand for infrastructure improvements, which bodes well for companies such as Nucor.

Nucor also liked Marion because in addition to fitting the company’s strategy it “stood out, having a lot of the fundamental things that would support manufacturing, not only for the short-term, but the long-term, so Marion was a very attractive acquisition.”

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