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Manufacturers, jobs growing with Sumter

By Summer Jarro, Daily Sun Staff Writer
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Keith Lamoreaux, a furnace operator with Primus Pipe & Tube in Wildwood, prepares equipment that will cool stainless steel tubes that have been heated to 1,950 degrees Fahrenheit.

George Horsford, Daily Sun

A vital part of any economy or community is growing and thriving in Sumter County. The number of manufacturing companies in the county is increasing, as are production and jobs. Crevalle Boats, a boat manufacturing company in Wildwood, reached a major milestone in November by building its 500th boat. “It’s really exciting,” said Jessica DaCosta, human resources and marketing manager for Crevalle. “Five hundred boats is a lot, and we’re a newer company. So we’re getting over that hump,

and people are looking at us differently and seeing us as competition.” Along with the milestone, the company has added jobs. Crevalle has 33 employees and expects to add more in the future. When it started in 2014, there were only five employees.

Crevalle is just one of a substantial number of manufacturing companies Sumter County has added in the past decade.

There were 58 manufacturing establishments in the county as of 2019, an increase of about 35% from 2009 when there were only 43, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

These companies produce items for a wide array of industries, such as food and beverage, recreation, transportation, electronics and machinery, which help communities like Sumter County.

“Manufacturing is the backbone of our community,” said Christian Davidson, director of marketing and communications for the Manufacturers Association of Central Florida.

More than 20,000 manufacturing businesses call Florida home, according to the MACF.

Crevalle, along with Primus Pipe and Tube and Great Southern Wood Preserving, are manufacturing establishments that reflect the trends manifesting themselves in Sumter County. The companies are seeing job growth, producing more goods and going through expansion projects.

“We are seeing manufacturers place a greater focus on automation in their processes, as well as expand at their existing facilities rather than a new location,” said Jada Glover, Sumter County economic development specialist. “With the rise of local distribution centers, there is also an emphasis on local production to meet the growing needs of the region.”

Manufacturing businesses are vital to the economy. Every \$1 of manufactured goods produces \$3.60 in other sectors, according to FloridaMakes.

And Sumter is producing and selling more of its manufactured products.

Manufacturers in the county reported about \$285 million total manufacturing sales produced for the first 10 months of 2019, which ended Oct. 31.

For the first 10 months of 2010, there were about \$131 million in total manufacturing sales, according to Florida Department of Revenue data.

“Sumter County embraces the expansion of this industry because it provides diversification of the tax base for sustainable growth,” Glover said. “The largest capital investment and job growth in manufacturing stem from our existing industries expanding.”

There was a 10% increase in manufacturing jobs in the last decade, with 1,174 manufacturing employees in Sumter County in 2018. In 2009, there were 1,065 manufacturing employees, according to the BLS.

Crevalle is starting to produce another model of boat for consumers to purchase.

The company specializes in making a 24-foot model and two 26-foot models, and in February, the company will release its new 33-foot boat model at the Miami International Boat Show.

“The 33-foot boat will put us into a different market than we are right now,” DaCosta said. “It will definitely help us grow, which in turn will create more jobs. We will have a whole line available.”

In the past year, Crevalle Boats’ employment rate has stayed relatively the same, but with the addition of new model, the company expects to add about five more employees and grow from there.

The company has spent the last year more focused on increasing efficiency than job growth. It has worked on cutting down the amount of time it takes to work on putting together a boat, DaCosta said.

Great Southern Wood Preserving in Lake Panasoffkee is expanding its pressure-treated lumber manufacturing operation.

The company is working on an expansion project that will add an 85,000-square-foot building to an additional treatment facility for the company’s YellaWood brand products.

A 63,000-square-foot storage building also will be added, and the company has expanded its distribution area, said Jarrod Myers, general manager for Great Southern Wood Preserving.

Work on the expansion project began at the beginning of 2019 and is expected to be finished and be in use in the spring.

“The expansion will allow us to more efficiently handle current demand, will provide added capacity to accommodate increased demand, and will give us increased flexibility to better service our customers’ needs when the next major weather event like Hurricane Irma strikes our state,” Myers

said.

The company provides services linked to construction and remodeling, which is in demand especially after a major storm hits an area.

Great Southern Wood also has increased its production in the last decade.

In 2019 about 12,000 truckloads of the company's products were shipped, an increase from 7,000 truckloads in 2010.

The company's volume of employees also has grown. Today, there are more than 100 employees, up from 50 in 2010.

Primus Pipe and Tube in Wildwood has invested about \$30 million in an expansion project for its stainless pipe and aluminum operations.

Construction is underway to build a 140,000-square-foot building next to the manufacturing company's plant. Forty-thousand square feet will be used for manufacturing and the other 100,000 square feet will be used for warehouse jobs.

The company began the project at the beginning of 2019 and expects to have a ribbon-cutting to celebrate the opening of the new building by the end of the second quarter of this year, said Kris Podsiad, vice president and general manager of Primus Pipe and Tube.

With the expansion project, the company expects to see job growth. It should bring in about six new jobs, Podsiad said.

In 2019, there was a reduction in staff because several people retired or moved to other jobs, but the company has had a steady increase through the years.

Primus Pipe and Tube has seen about a 10% increase in jobs at their own company in the last five years. They don't see 2020 as being their strongest year but the start of more growth for the company.

"We'll see improvement from 2020 and beyond," Podsiad said.

The outlook for manufacturing businesses in Sumter County in 2020 is continued growth.

As many manufacturing businesses expand, the new developments will offer opportunities for more jobs in the region, Glover said.

Manufacturing jobs are expected to grow 5.9% between 2019 and 2027 in the Central Florida region including Sumter County, according to industry data released by the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity.

“We expect additional expansions by the manufacturers in the county and region because of the continued population growth, key transportation assets, and proximity to markets,” Glover said.

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