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New manufacturing plant opens in Fairfield

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By Chelsey Levingston

Staff Writer

FAIRFIELD — The Western States Machine Co. is celebrating the opening of its new \$6.5 million, 76,000-square-foot facility in Fairfield, likely Butler County's newest manufacturing plant.

Western States makes centrifuges — machines that separate liquids from solids — used by the sugar, chemical and pharmaceutical industries.

The local company began operating in August out of the newly built plant on Commerce Center Drive, completing the company's move from Hamilton to Fairfield, company executives said. An open house was held Tuesday to show off the company's new headquarters, which includes office, warehouse and manufacturing floor space.

Previously, Western States leased offices at 530 N. Third St. in Hamilton for about 10 years. Founded in 1917, Western States moved to Hamilton from out of state in the 1920s or 1930s.

Western States outgrew its last space. The new Fairfield facility gives the company more room to work, and because it was designed from the ground up, it is better laid out for more efficient production, said Bob Sinnard, director of sales and marketing, and David Douglas Buckner, president and chief executive officer.

"As we grow, it's designed to be expanded," Sinnard said about the new Fairfield plant.

Western States is up to 76 employees.

"We were recruited by a lot of places to come," Sinnard said. But company officials chose to move eight miles away to retain long-term employees and because of a local network of suppliers and subcontractors along the Interstate 75 corridor, Sinnard and Buckner said.

Western States is a comeback story, considering the company nearly closed at the turn of the last decade.

Struggling with outdated equipment and facilities, and high costs, Western States had stopped manufacturing centrifuges in December of 1999. It sold buildings in Hamilton at a former location and leased office space, becoming a sales and design only operation.

But the more employees continued to do design and sales, and as business picked back up, it became clear there wasn't the same level of production quality. In 2009, Western States started manufacturing baskets again, a key component to centrifuges. By the end of that same year, it had brought shipping and receiving, inventory and final assembly functions back in-house.

All critical rotating components of a centrifuge are produced by Western States. Steel fabrication, for example, is outsourced. And Western States employees do all final assembly.

"I think we're just doing things better now than in the past," Buckner said. "Frankly, we build a heck of a machine."

The nearly 100-year-old company currently does business in 35 countries. It is the only U.S. manufacturer of centrifuges used by sugar companies. Its customers include Domino Sugar, Sinnard said.

There are 6,000 centrifuge machines in service worldwide made by Western States, including some centrifuges running for 40 to 50 years.

Each machine is custom made. Western States will never obsolete a machine, one thing it is known for by its customers, Buckner said.

The company's inventory includes thousands of spare parts stored for customers in the case of a break-down or replacement.

In addition to sales of centrifuges built for new customers, a big piece of Western States' business is sales of parts to replace or refurbish existing centrifuges, Buckner said.

"We want the machines to last," Buckner said.

Western States Machine Co.

What: Makes centrifuges (machines that separate liquids from solids) used by sugar, chemical and pharmaceutical industries

Where: Moved in August 2013 to 625 Commerce Center Drive, Fairfield; previously operated in Hamilton

Phone: 513-863-4758

Chief Executive Officer: David Douglas Buckner

Website: www.westernstates.com

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Get a behind-the-scenes look at the Western States Machine Co.'s new manufacturing plant with our online photo gallery at www.journal-news.com or www.middletonjournal.com

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Great news for Fairfield

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