

A Royal Welcome
By Trent Moore
The Cullman Times
February 18, 2009 08:53 pm

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Staff Writer

As many as 300-400 new jobs are on the way to Cullman. Royal Technologies, a Michigan-based company, has announced plans to expand to the Cullman area with a new manufacturing operation. The injection molding, urethane foam and light assembly company specializes in components for office furniture and interior trim for automobiles.

Royal Technologies officially announced plans Wednesday afternoon to build a new, approximately 125,000-square-foot facility in Cullman, with the possibility of further expansion in the future. The new plant will be located on a 26.6-acre plot beside the Alabama Cullman Yutaka Corporation (ACYT), near the corner of Highway 157 and Highway 278, in Industrial Park 5. Royal Technologies' five-year investment for the project — including land, construction and equipment — is expected to total as much as \$30 million.

Jim Vander Kolk, president of Royal Technologies, said Cullman presented an ideal Southern location to expand his business. "This is the right decision, and it just feels good," he said. "This is exciting for our company and this community. You have our commitment." Vander Kolk said a ground-breaking date has yet to be set, though he hopes work on the plant can begin soon. "We want to start sooner rather than later," he said.

Numerous state and local officials attended a formal industry announcement Wednesday at Wallace State Community College for Royal Technologies, and offered their thoughts on the news. Governor Bob Riley said it was a great accomplishment for the state, especially considering the national economic climate. "I hope you all realize how significant this is," he said. "This is possibly the only industry announcement in Alabama, the South, or in all of America, today."

Lt. Governor Jim Folsom Jr. echoed those sentiments, adding he was proud the expansion came to Cullman, specifically. "This is a great honor for my hometown," he said. "The commitment to community here speaks volumes."

Dale Greer, assistant director of Cullman Economic Development, said the announcement could prove to be a major boost for the local economy. "With the tough economic times, this is a welcome development," he said. "I think it will definitely create some opportunities here." Greer added that the majority of jobs being created by the new location will be filled by local people. "They will be re-locating a few key officials, but the overwhelming amount of those jobs will be filled by Cullman residents," he said.

Cullman Economic Development Director Peggy Smith said the process of bringing Royal Technologies to Cullman began in mid-July, 2008. "At the time, they were looking at about 33 different communities," she said. "This will be an expansion of the operations they already have in Michigan.

We're very excited to be involved."

Greer said other local industries helped encourage Royal Technologies officials to consider the area. "The many existing industries we have, they've been our best salesmen," he said.

In preparation for the announcement, the Cullman City Council recently approved plans to add water and sewer lines to the plot where the plant will be located, at an estimated cost of \$350,000. The infrastructure work is being handled by Utility Engineering Consultants, LLC.

Wallace State Community College has also signed on to provide workforce training courses for Royal Technologies with Alabama Industrial Development Training (AIDT), if local training is needed. "We will partner to provide training whenever they need it," WSCC President Vicki Hawsey said.

Royal Technologies has been in business for more than 20 years and currently operates three manufacturing locations, as well as a corporate center. The company employs approximately 910 people nationwide.

More information about the company can be found at its official Web site, www.royaltechnologiescorp.com.

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Photos



Jim Vander Kolk, left, president of Royal Technologies, shakes hands with Alabama Gov. Bob Riley at an afternoon press conference announcing the company will expand into the Cullman area. Looking on, from left, are Wallace State Community College President Vicki Hawsey, Dale Greer, assistant director of Cullman Economic Development, and Congressman Robert Aderholt. The Cullman Times