

Tecumseh Expects Growth in Near Future

The Tecumseh Products Company, known for its outstanding engine manufacturing, got its start in the 1930s in Hillsdale, Mich. The firm first manufactured automobile and electric refrigerator parts, small tools, and mechanical novelties. Seventy years later and many expansions and purchases of other similar companies around the globe, Tecumseh is now a highly regarded manufacturer of a myriad of engine-related products, including carburetors, compressors, and two- and four-cycle engines for outdoor power equipment.

In the early 1990s, Tecumseh was looking for a workforce that could help it expand its production in the South so the company could better serve its large-volume customers in Georgia, Mississippi, and Tennessee. After several visits to Georgia and lengthy negotiations with Jim Steed of the Georgia Department of Industry, Trade & Tourism, the company chose Douglas for a plant to expand its carburetor manufacturing. This quickly evolved into small-engine manufacturing and die casting as well.

“Quick Start is really the reason we’ve been able to grow here,” says Bill Tate, director of operations at the Douglas facility. “Since 1995 we’ve had 50 percent growth, and this was almost completely dependent on our ability to have a skilled labor force. Quick Start has been so flexible in its training, and they really bent over backwards to accommodate our needs.”

The company will be adding a third engine-assembly line and approximately 50 employees this spring. “We are number two in the small-engine world. We are trying to position ourselves as number one, and this Douglas facility is absolutely essential to that goal,” says Tate.

The caliber of the workforce and the willingness of people to work and their desire to learn have calmed initial concerns of the northern company’s administration. “What we have found is that this labor force is willing to learn and embrace change. There is a strong

cultural foundation of people who are not scared to try something new. They want to work, and Quick Start’s efforts have really paid off,” says Tate.

Tecumseh has enjoyed a training partnership with Quick Start for more than five years. Current employment is approximately 925 in the 345,000 square-foot building. Quick Start’s training has included manufacturing process, die casting, engine and carburetor assembly, machining, and more. Training has been in the classroom and on-the-job and has included supervisor/leadership training, as well as manufacturing skills. **QS**



Christy Chaney, a Tecumseh employee, works on an engine.

Economic Developers Laud Quick Start

Saralyn Stafford, president of the Douglas-Coffee County Chamber of Commerce and Development Authority, believes Tecumseh’s decision to open the Douglas facility was the result of the community’s leadership team, which is able to work closely and cooperatively. A good workforce has been key as well and, fortunately, area citizens have experience in metalworking due to other established industries, such as PCC Airfoils, Inter-Metro Industries (shelving), and Fleetwood Homes.



Saralyn Stafford



Francis Lott

“Quick Start was a very important part of our recruitment with Tecumseh, and East Central Technical College played a key role as well. Tecumseh has lots of manufacturing plants throughout the world, and they have told me repeatedly that Quick Start is the very best training program they’ve utilized,” says Stafford.

Francis Lott, chairman and CEO of Lott Properties and a native of

Coffee County, has served voluntarily as an economic developer since the early 1970s. (In 1995, the year Tecumseh announced it would come to Douglas, Lott was named volunteer of the year by the Georgia Economic Developers Association.) His home county, which traditionally was based in agriculture—cotton, tobacco, and poultry, specifically—got a toehold in manufacturing in the early days of mobile home manufacturing. Now this economic landscape has changed dramatically.

“In rural Georgia, we are the star in economic development,” says Lott proudly. “In the general population only one in 11 people is involved in industry. In Coffee County, it’s one in four. We have had to grow and diversify, and we continue to do so thanks to programs like Quick Start and the technical colleges’ dramatic improvement across the state.”