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Whirlpool to whip up jobs Cleveland manufacturer announces \$120 million expansion

By Mike Pare

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CLEVELAND, Tenn. — Whirlpool Corp. employee Cheryl Johnston said the company's biggest-ever new plant project will give her something few workers have these days — job security.

"It's going to keep us all working," she said Wednesday after Whirlpool unveiled plans to build a \$120 million plant in Bradley County.

The Michigan-based appliance maker, already Cleveland's largest employer, said it will add 130 jobs to its existing work force of 1,500, which assembles ranges and ovens.

"To build a factory and to be able to be in production, it takes time," said Al Holaday, Whirlpool's vice president of manufacturing in North America. "We're looking forward. We believe in the U.S. economy."

The company plans to start work later this year on the 1 million-squarefoot factory, which also includes a 400,000-square-foot warehouse. It will go up on an undeveloped site at Benton •

Pike and Michigan Avenue and replace Whirlpool's current 100-year-old facility near downtown Cleveland, officials said.

Production is expected to start in early 2012.

MAJOR INVESTMENTS

The announcement, made to an upbeat group of about 100 Cleveland public officials, economic developers and business people, is among a half dozen large manufacturing projects that Southeast Tennessee has landed in recent years.

Volkswagen's auto assembly plant in Chattanooga and Wacker Chemical's polycrystalline silicon factory in Bradley are among the projects, each with investments of at least \$1 billion.

"It's important to our future," said U.S. Rep. Zach Wamp, R-Tenn. "Jobs is the No. 1 issue."

Matt Kisber, state commissioner of economic and community development, said Whirlpool's planned factory is "a vote of confidence" in Tennessee and the productivity and quality of its workers.

Kisber said the company is eligible for both infrastructure and job training incentives from the state. He said he didn't know a specific dollar value on the incentives.

According to Whirlpool, the new plant, located about seven miles from its existing factory, will be state-of-the-art and Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certified, a designation that says the plant meets certain energy efficiency standards.

Dicky Walters, Whirlpool's plant leader in Cleveland, said new hiring for the factory will begin in several months. Typical pay for the jobs ranges from \$10.15 to \$22 per hour along with a full benefits slate, he said.

— U.S. Rep. Zach Wamp, R- Tenn.

PAST AND FUTURE

Gary Farlow, the Cleveland/Bradley Chamber of Commerce president, said the new plant "means Whirlpool will be here for a long time to come."

The company acquired the existing Cleveland plant when it bought rival Maytag Corp. four years ago. Maytag had bought Magic Chef in Cleveland in 1986.

Whirlpool has closed facilities in Oxford, Miss., and Evansville, Ind., as it reorganizes its operations. However, it also is

investing in other sites, such as spending \$175 million on its laundry product facilities in Clyde, Ohio.

“We’ve made several key investments this year alone,” said D. Jeffrey Noel, a Whirlpool vice president.

Bradley County Mayor D. Gary Davis said the county “continues to grow in sustainable ways.”

Cleveland Mayor Tom Rowland cited the work ethic of Whirlpool’s employees.

“They know how to do the job and do it right,” he said.

Online: Hear Matt

Kisber talk about the Whirlpool plant. Read previous stories.



Staff Photo by Mike Pare

Melissa Haynes, a Whirlpool Corp. employee, works on an oven at the company’s plant in Cleveland, Tenn.



Staff Photo by Mike Pare

Whirlpool Corp. is planning a new facility.