

Belvidere Fiat Chrysler supplier chooses Beloit

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BELOIT, Wis. — An Ohio company that will supply components to Fiat Chrysler Automotive's Belvidere plant is moving to a facility on industrial property here, giving Wisconsin an economic development win in a border war with Illinois.

Toledo Molding and Die Inc., will bring 118 jobs to Wisconsin Stateline Industrial Park, at Willowbrook and Stateline Roads near Interstate 90/39, where in May Hendricks Commercial Properties started construction on a building without a tenant.

Toledo, which has nine facilities around the country, will make plastic interior and air and fluid management systems for the Jeep Cherokee, the new model that will be assembled in Belvidere.

Although land is available in Illinois closer to Belvidere, developers have avoided putting up spec buildings in recent years, despite what regional economic development groups have characterized as a shortage of new industrial space here.

The 105,000-square-foot building will be ready in November, just as Cherokee production ramps up.

"This building is the prototype for similar industrial development projects we are in the process of starting across the country so we are pleased to see how well it has been received here," Rob Gerbitz, CEO of Hendricks Commercial Properties, said in a news release.

There will be vacancies in and around the Belvidere plant in coming months as current Fiat Chrysler suppliers move out as production shifts to the Jeep Cherokee. But inventory is tight for companies looking for modern space they can occupy immediately.

“That’s true,” said Jarid Funderburg, executive director of Growth Dimensions, which provides economic development marketing to Belvidere and Boone County. “When it comes to modern industrial facilities, we just have very little vacancy.”

Fiat Chrysler was scheduled to end production in Belvidere of the Dodge Dart last month and is scheduled to stop building the Jeep Compass and Patriot in December. Cherokee production is expected to start late this year and ramp up toward capacity in 2016.

In recent years there has been fierce competition between Illinois and Wisconsin for economic development along the state borders.

During its negotiations with the city of Rockford over the \$585 million hospital campus it was planning at Interstate 90 and West Riverside Boulevard this year, Mercyhealth threatened to move the campus to industrial land in Beloit. But an agreement was reached to keep Mercyhealth here.

In 2006, office supply company Staples Inc. put a huge fulfillment center just across the border in Wisconsin.

Andrew Janke, executive director of the Greater Beloit Economic Development Corp., said one of the ways the city of Beloit competes is by owning shovel-ready industrial sites that it will sell for \$1 to a developer or end user who brings jobs and investment to the area.

Janke said that while Toledo may have chosen Beloit, the creation of 188 jobs will have economic tentacles along the I-90/39 corridor.

“We like to say our workforce extends from Madison to Belvidere,” Janke said. “Of course, we hope a tremendous number of those jobs are held by Beloiters. But at the end of the day, jobs will also go to people from Janesville, Clinton, Belvidere, Roscoe, Rockton, Rockford and other areas.

“These large economic development projects benefit the entire region.”

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