

Whirlpool adding 500 jobs in Cleveland

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Online: Hear the briefing by local officials, Mayors Tom Rowland, D. Gary Davis, Chamber of Commerce officials and others. [Comment.](#)

CLEVELAND, Tenn. ‹ Most of the 500 jobs created in Cleveland by the closure of a Whirlpool plant in Mississippi will be filled by local people, corporate officials say.

According to a news release, Whirlpool will consolidate manufacturing of built-in ovens and cooktops from Oxford, Miss., into the Cleveland plant.

Jody Lau, spokeswoman for the corporation, said the transition will happen over the next 12 months.

³Some salaried employees will relocate to other Whirlpool facilities, as long as there are appropriate openings that exist,² Ms. Lau said. But most of the jobs will be filled by Cleveland residents, she said.

The news is the equivalent of a new industry, Bradley County Mayor D. Gary Davis said.

³It could have easily gone the other way,² Mr. Davis said. ³Retaining industry is important if not more important than bringing in new industry some times.²

The news is greeted in Cleveland with ³a sigh of relief,² said Jerry Bohannon, president and CEO of the Cleveland-Bradley County Chamber of Commerce. Whirlpool is Cleveland's largest industry.

³The first thing it does is solidify the 1,000 jobs here,² Mr. Bohannon said. ³Over the years, there's been some apprehension about what's going to happen to the plant here.²

The jobs will provide Cleveland's workers some security and boost the local economy, he said.

Whirlpool also is closing its plant in Puebla, Mexico. About 140 jobs from the Puebla plant will be moved to a plant in Celaya, Mexico, the release states.

³These kinds of decisions are never easy, and we make them only after comprehensive evaluation of alternatives,² said Al Holaday, vice president of manufacturing operations in North America.

Whirlpool officials say the company will provide support to employees who were dismissed and to their families during the transition period.

The job boost in Cleveland is ³tremendous news,² U.S. Rep. Zach Wamp, R-Tenn., said Thursday.

³Whirlpool's decision to grow its manufacturing operations in Cleveland recognizes the high-quality work force and the local leadership through Mayor Tom Rowland and the Chamber of Commerce,² Rep. Wamp said in a release.

He said local and federal efforts corrected a flooding problem affecting Whirlpool's Cleveland operations.

³The construction of several detention ponds for flood control has made a huge difference in relieving much of the frequent flooding in the downtown business district and residential communities of Cleveland.²

Mr. Davis and Mr. Rowland both credited Rep. Wamp and Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., for securing money to build the detention ponds. Rep. Wamp has had frequent meetings at the Cleveland plant to push the project along, Mr. Rowland said.

³I think that sent a message to Whirlpool that this community was

serious about keeping them here,² Mr. Rowland said.

In addition to flood control, local governments also offered incentives to Whirlpool to expand here, working with the state, said Mr. Bohannon. More information on the incentive plan will be presented next week before the City Council and county commission, said Gary Farlow, the chamber's vice president for industrial development.

The additional jobs will have a ripple effect on the local economy, Mr. Bohannon said.

³We are assuming there are some purchases of a new automobile, new television, new furniture that has been put aside due to the uncertainty. Those questions have been put aside,² Mr. Bohannon said.

Despite a gloomy national economic outlook, local officials point out that Thursday's announcement follows job expansions by other companies with local plants including Schering-Plough, Cormetech and the GE lighting productions warehouse.

Staff writer Cliff Hightower contributed to this story.

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