

Norfolk expansion brings 30 jobs

By Scott Rochat

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Norfolk Iron and Metal announced details this morning of a \$2.2 million expansion that will add 30 jobs to the plant.

"They're bursting at the seams and they need the space," said Kent Heermann, director of the Regional Development Association of East Central Kansas.

The Emporia City Commission tentatively approved a package of incentives and tax breaks for Norfolk with final approval to wait until a contract is in place. Under the deal, in exchange for the expansion and jobs, Norfolk would get a 10-year tax break on the real estate, \$360,000 in four payments and 13 acres south of the plant.

Today, the Emporia plant employs 149 people. The plant would be 230,000 square feet after the expansion.

"It's been a great partnership," Norfolk General Manager Jeff Bessmer said. "We just look at this as another strong step. We're not done. We will proceed and we will grow."

Bessmer said the company has been anticipating this since the plant opened, but serious discussions began about six months ago. The expansion will take place in the warehousing part of the plant. Norfolk is a warehouse and distributor that supplies steel to manufacturers who then turn it into finished goods.

Bessmer said that the main plant in Norfolk, Neb. would also be expanding.

Most of the Emporia jobs added would be in the warehouse, Bessmer said, but the growth would also include some drivers, a couple of office positions and other areas in the company.

Holes for soil tests were drilled at the site Monday. Bessmer said the company hopes to have the Emporia expansion done by March.

"We're praying for (warm) winter weather like we had last year," he said. "If we can get that, we'll do very well."

Heermann and some of the commissioners noted that Norfolk has a good track record in the community. Its original incentive agreement promised to create at least 75 jobs, which the company ended up doubling.

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