

# Council thanks Flowers, Technibilt for job growth

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Each day Flowers Foods of Newton produces 60,000 buns an hour weighing in at more than 7,000 pounds. The Danner Industrial Park facility also produces about 10,000 loaves of bread every hour — that's more than 12,000 pounds in baked dough.

That operation currently employs about 225 people who keep production lines operating close to 150 hours every week — almost 90 percent of the time between midnight Sunday and midnight the following Saturday.

Just down East P Street from Newton's newest bakery another manufacturing operation is turning out numbers just as impressive.

At Technibilt, more than 300 employees produce 650,000 grocery carts every year for companies like Lowes, Family Dollar and Best Buy.

But not many people know exactly what is happening in the nondescript buildings inside Newton's Danner Industrial Park area.

On Tuesday, Newton city officials got an inside look at these growing manufacturing operations.

"We took this opportunity to see some of the industries in the town," said Newton Mayor Robert Mullinax. "(The Flowers Foods of



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Carts are lined up in the Technibilt factory in Newton on Tuesday when the city council took a tour of the facility.

# Jobs

CONTINUED FROM 1

Newton) plant, we've talked about and heard about so much, we wanted to come see the final product."

"A lot of people in Newton don't know about Technibilt," he continued, "but they produce 650,000 shopping carts a year. That's incredible."

Mullinax said city leaders regularly visit industries in the city - large and small - and the only difference in this week's visits is the products created inside the two Danner Park properties.

"It is good to know what is going on, and where our hot dog buns come from," Newton's mayor joked. For many people in the southeast, Flowers Foods of Newton is where "hot dog buns come from."

"We are the No. 1 bakery in the region. In terms of dollars, we are ahead of the store brands in sales ... We're very excited about being here," said Dale Mull, president of Flowers Foods of Newton. "When we started we had modest goals: We wanted to be the best bakery in the company. I think we have surpassed that. Now we are looking at being the best bakery in North America. A lot of that is thanks to working with (Newton city officials)."

Recently featured in trade magazine "Baking and Snacks," Flowers Foods has experienced booming growth in Newton since arriving there. Since acquiring the 100,000 square-foot facility formerly owned by Harvest States, Flowers Foods spent just 87 weeks adding more than 100,000 square feet of space, two complete production lines — a bun and a bread line — and gearing up its production to 95 percent capacity.

That growth aims to keep up with the demand for Flowers Foods' various bun and bread lines, such as

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Nature's Own. In 2002, The Nature's Own bread brand sold about 32 million units, Mull said. This year, that number is expected to reach 61.4 million.

"Nature's Own is the No. 1 selling loaf in the country and we're only selling in one-third of the nation," Mull said, adding Flowers Foods sales in the region have increased by about 10 percent "year after year."

In 2002, Flowers Foods reported about \$250 million sales from Newton's region of the nation. This year that numbers is expected to top \$473 million.

"In 2002, our market share was 21 percent," Mull said. "Today our market share is 28.4 percent."

Meanwhile, Mull plans to continue growth in Newton, which currently houses only production. The facility has allocated space and will someday house a sales division for the baking company, Mull said.

"Before we do that we just want to make sure the facility is up and running," Mull said. "Now, we're just tickled to death."

Not far from Flowers' new facility, Technibilt is leading the United States in a few categories of its own. For one, the company is one of five shopping

cart manufacturers in the nation, and Technibilt is the largest cart creator in the U.S. and in North America.

In a 300,000 square-foot facility in Newton and a 60,000 square-foot facility in Maiden, Technibilt produces shopping carts for national retailers such as Home Depot, Lowes, Lowes Foods, Wal-Mart, Harris-Teeter, Circuit City and hundreds of other customers.

Technibilt President Pierre Lafleur said the company has experienced tremendous growth in recent years. In fact, just two years ago, the company employed 214 people. Now it employs 326 workers that fill shifts that keep production going 24/7. The company is even looking for new help - hiring six to 12 new employees each week, he said.

In 2007, the company will produce more than 650,000 carts — it's already created 500,000 this year — and that is a big jump from the 291,000 carts it manufactured five years ago. During the past five years, the company has seen growth in business of about 10 percent, Lafleur said.

Meanwhile, in addition to growing business and adding workforce, Technibilt invests about \$10 million annually into the local economy by purchasing wire and tubing from area companies. Those supplies eventually roll into shopping area nationwide.

Technibilt has been in business more than 50 years and arrived in Newton in 1983.

"It's fascinating," Mullinax said of his tours of the Newton-area manufacturing plants. "It is important for elected officials to see the fruits of their labors. It is important for the City Council to know what is going on in our city, whether the industry is large or small."