

Hickory Springs to open innovation center

Company plans greater research and development investment

From staff reports

HICKORY — Integrated components manufacturer Hickory Springs said it is placing a greater emphasis on research and development, and that the company would open a new corporate innovation center here.

Tapping a 30,000-square-foot complex owned by the company on Debra Herman Road, the center will be strategically located among several of Hickory Springs' major facilities and corporate headquarters.

The new Corporate Innovation and Testing Center is expected to be operational by December. The majority of the space in the new complex will be dedicated to controlled labs designed for the testing of products for automotive, commercial transportation, healthcare, government markets, telecommunications and home furnishings sectors. About 10,000-square-foot will be showrooms and conference rooms where customers and vendors will be able to work collaboratively on new products, programs and services.

"We have taken significant steps to align our company and management to reflect future growth and diversification opportunities. A key objective is rapid identification of new products, services and businesses across all our divisions," said Dwayne Welch, Hickory Springs executive vice president.

"Because of the diversification of our products, we saw a need to bring product design and testing under one roof to streamline our processes while improving efficiency."

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Brad McNeely, a Hickory Springs veteran executive, was recently promoted to the newly created post of vice president of new product development, and he will oversee operations of the new center.

He will work alongside Mike Simmons, who recently assumed the role of vice president of new market development, and is tasked with increasing customer interaction and integration with new product and business development.

Company officials would not say how many people will work at the new facility or if it will add staff.

"Because today's markets and customer demands change rapidly, we have a constant need to leverage our expertise and respond quickly," McNeely said.

"With many of the innovation responsibilities tied to the manufacturing plants, we have already laid the groundwork for creating this centralized effort. Bringing our R&D groups together, under one roof, enables us to step up our responsiveness and communications with our customers, as we will now have a team that is dedicated full time to developing new and improved products for existing and future markets."

Based in Hickory, Hickory Springs is a privately held company with more than 50 manufacturing plants in 16 states and China. In addition to its core furniture and bedding markets, Hickory Springs also serves a range of customers in the automotive, recreational vehicle, packaging, medical, marine and telecommunications industries.

On the Net:

www.hickorysprings.com