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## **New Manufacturing Business Incubator to Break Ground in Florence**

*By Amy Lyons*

Construction is set to begin in late 2010 on the The Southeastern Institute of Manufacturing and Technology's (SiMT) newest facility. One of eight facilities that is part of SiMT's master plan for its 146-acre campus in Florence, South Carolina, the new building will be a manufacturing business incubator facility, a place where new businesses can grow with an eye on expansion and autonomy.

"We are really trying to create some manufacturing-based businesses in the area that would migrate out of the incubator facility into outside facilities to create jobs for the local economy," said SiMT director, Jack Roach.

Since its inception three years ago, SiMT has provided technical services and training for an array of industries in the southeastern United States. They offer programs in robotics, electronics, fluid power and a number of other manufacturing areas. The continuing education arm of Florence-Darlington Technical College, SiMT's campus sits directly behind the college, creating a cohesive relationship between classroom education and real-world skills development. The new facility will become part of this sprawling educational village by October, 2011, when it is slated to be officially opened.

Though the new facility is all about generating jobs and providing an economic boost in the area, SiMT has already proven itself as a leader in workforce and product development.

When Struthers-Dunn, a relay manufacturer specializing in traffic signals, realized their product needed updating in order to stay competitive in the Chicago area, they came to SiMT. Working with SiMT, the Florence-based Struthers-Dunn came up with a re-designed, higher quality relay product that has allowed them to remain competitive in working with the City of Chicago's streetlights.

And when Turnstyle Enterprises—a Georgetown, South Carolina, manufacturer of gate-hinge systems--needed rapid prototyping on a new backyard gate product, SiMT stepped in to do the work. The prototype made by SiMT was used to build functional units, which are essentially self-latching gates. After working with SiMT, Turnstyle Enterprises got its first production order in early 2010 to put its new hinge system in 1,000 Home Depot stores.

On the training front, SiMT has the latest and greatest machining equipment--from CNC machines to electrodischarge machines--found in the typical machining production facility. The equipment is available for training employees or for fabricating components.

“There are companies that don't want to spend a hundred thousand dollars on a CNC machine,” Roach said. “They can lease time on our machines instead.”

Though SiMT is fairly new, it often partners with one of the oldest and most renowned workforce training programs in the United States, ReadySC.

Established in 1961, ReadySC has proven an important part of the state's technical college system, which includes 16 colleges throughout the state preparing young adults for careers in biotech, aerospace, textiles and an additional array of industries

Joe W. King, executive director of the Florence County Economic Development Partnership, said ReadySC, which worked with Florence-Dunn Technical College and SiMT to hire and train hundreds of employees at the Monster.com customer service facility that came to Florence in 2009, is second-to-none in workforce development.

“The great thing about ReadySC is that it's a custom training program,” King said. “Each company has different needs and they tailor the program to meet those needs.”

King went on to say that the new manufacturing business incubator at SiMT will be a welcomed source of job creation in the region. Michael Hackman, founder and chief executive officer of Hackman Capital Partners, LLC--one of three owners of Florence Industrial Center, a 423,581 square foot, Class-A industrial facility located a stone's throw from SiMT—agreed with King, saying job creation is the name of the game as the economy begins to recover.

“We look forward to the presence of SiMT's new facility and are excited that it is happening right in our own backyard,” Hackman said. “Hackman Capital is thrilled to have a manufacturing and distribution facility within walking distance of this hive of workforce training activity.”

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