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Engineering firm moving to Sarasota

RND Automation gets incentives, larger facility

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SARASOTA -- A Manatee County manufacturer is getting a \$15,000 grant to relocate to Sarasota County.

RND Automation & Engineering plans to join at least two other Manatee County companies that have moved across the county line this year. The manufacturer, which specializes in custom factory automation, plans to relocate in January after the Sarasota County Commission on Tuesday agreed to award the company economic development incentives.

"We needed a larger facility as we had started to outgrow this one," said Sean Dotson, a professional engineer and president of RND Automation & Engineering. "The industrial market is fairly depressed right now and they're looking to make deals."

The Manatee Economic Development Council offered incentives to retain RND Automation & Engineering but ultimately Dotson said a 6,000 square-foot facility was the right fit and bargain for his company.

Dotson did not disclose details of the lease at his new facility on Independence Boulevard in northern Sarasota County, which is about 1,200 square feet larger than RND's facility on Tallevast Road.

"Both counties offered possible assistance but we found a better location in Sarasota County," Dotson said.

Eric Basinger, executive director of the Manatee EDC, said RND Automation and Engineering was offered an economic development grant totaling \$2,000 for each job the manufacturer vowed to create. In addition, the company would have qualified for workforce training assistance, rapid response permitting and impact fee relief if it opted to build a new facility.

"We can offer incentives but there's only so much they can budget for leases and property expenses," Basinger said. "At the end of the day the jobs are going to be secured and we're very happy about that."

Earlier this year, Sarasota County's incentives and commercial real estate offerings also won over MyUs.com and Sunovia Energy Technologies, both of which hail from Manatee.

In June, Sarasota County commissioners approved MyUs.com, a package forwarding company, for \$165,000 in economic development incentives to relocate from a 40,000-square-foot facility in Bradenton to a 60,000-square-foot building.

In April, Sunovia Energy Technologies Inc., which develops solar lighting products, announced it would relocate from a 5,500-square-foot facility in South Manatee County to a 18,000-square-foot space at Cattlemen and Fruitville roads. In return, the company is getting a \$50,000 grant from Sarasota County.

Economic development officials at Sarasota County and the Sarasota EDC have been in negotiations with RND Automation and Engineering for a couple of months, said Jeff Maultsby, business and economic development manager of Sarasota County.

"They fit the profile of the types of companies we're trying to attract here," Maultsby said.

"I think their actions indicate that they see us as a good fit, too."

In an ailing economy, RND Automation and Engineering has thrived as Dotson says most of its competitors have left the state and manufacturers look to maximize production.

RND custom factory automation and robotic work helps other manufacturers case, bottle or package a variety of products including contact lenses, hydraulic valves, food and beverages.

“Manufacturers now are trying to figure out how to maximize their output for minimal outlays and that’s typically where we come in,” Dotson said.

The company currently has five full-time employees and one full-time subcontractor. Over the next three years, the company plans to add one or two new positions at an average annual salary of \$45,000. The company’s estimated economic impact over the next three years is \$3.7 million, according to county documents.

Dotson said RND is expected to reach a little more than \$2 million in sales this year.

“For a company that’s only five years old we’ve done pretty well,” Dotson said.

Joan McGill, vice president of business development for the Sarasota EDC, said RND’s business-to-business service makes the manufacturer a promising company for Sarasota.

“They’re the largest company of this sort in the state of Florida now developing this machinery,” McGill said. “It’s a very small niche business.”