

Corrugated Replacements to expand Heat Treat, hire workers

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Local manufacturing powerhouse Corrugated Replacements, Inc. is expanding its facilities at North Georgia Heat Treat and taking applications for multiple positions inside the company.

So, what does Corrugated Replacements do? At its core, the company helps corrugated box plants maintain machinery by supplying replacement parts and offering other services like on-site rebuilds.

In a nutshell, the company makes all the parts that make boxes and keeps the machines running, too.

But Corrugated Replacements does so much more, including custom and highly specialized projects for thousands of clients all over the globe, with a total of eight sister companies based right here in Union County, including North Georgia Heat Treat.

Business has taken off amid COVID-19, as the surge in online shopping has ramped up the need for shipping boxes. The current expansion is occurring at Heat Treat, which manufactures corrugated knives and cuts any number of custom metal jobs using lasers and CNC machining.

Located off Commerce Way in the Blairsville Airport Industrial Park, the primary reason for Heat Treat's expansion is to separate the company's heating and cutting machinery into two buildings.

Historically, the business has operated out of a single facility, but separating the equipment will allow for one "clean" and one "dirty" building, as the heating equipment produces soot and dust that can cause issues with the cutting equipment over time.

To accomplish this, Corrugated has erected a new 12,500-square-foot facility next to the main Heat Treat building that the company purchased from the Union County Development Authority in 2016.

Heat Treat will be ready to move into the new building as soon as a second coat of sealant has been applied to the floor and the parking lot is completed, likely sometime in the next couple of months.

Fortunately for Union County, the expansion will mean new jobs to the area above and beyond what Corrugated is already hiring for, with positions available companywide in engineering, accounting, sales, human resources, machining and more.

"We definitely have to hire more employees," Corrugated President Jenny Chandler said. "We're always looking for employees - I can't find enough right now. And we want to find local people before we outsource.

"Especially for Heat Treat, where we've had some people



Corrugated Replacements Inc. President Jenny Chandler and Development Authority Director Mitch Griggs are often in contact regarding local economic opportunities, pictured here inside the new Heat Treat building. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

that have worn multiple hats out of necessity, having it in two separate buildings, I'll have to hire since they'll be separated.

"I'm always taking applications, and I hire every high school kid that puts in an application. We do the Work-Based Learning with the high school, and if you graduate high school and go to any college that is going to benefit Corrugated in your job, we give you a 100% scholarship.

"So, whether it's tech school, whether it's engineering at Georgia Tech - it doesn't matter. You just have to sign a contract that says you're going to pass or you have to pay for it, and you'll work three years after you graduate."

Corrugated is big on creating opportunities for people, which translates to happy employees and very low turnover. Education is a major part of the investment the company makes in its employees, which also includes the availability of a two-year in-house apprenticeship program.

"And you don't have to have a high school degree for that," Chandler said. "We start you, and you go through every area of our shop. It is recognized by the state, so there's pay along with it.

"It's very structured, you have to pass exams at the end of your time in that department in order to move onto the next department. And those have turned out to be our most valuable employees; our plant manager for Heat Treat was my first apprentice that went through."

Additionally, Chandler is a voting member on the Union County College and Career Academy Governing Board, which will be an important pipeline for students graduating from area schools to find local job opportunities to build up the community even more in the future.

"I hope the College and Career Academy is going to show kids you don't always have

to get a four-year degree to make a wonderful living; you can stay in Union County and learn trades," Chandler said. "Trades are dying because everybody thinks they need to get a four-year degree.

"So, I'm hoping it will bring other students in because it's open to other counties. And then, I hope that it will show people here that haven't been exposed to any of those opportunities what they can do."

Union County Development Authority Executive Director Mitch Griggs said Corrugated Replacements is a prime example of the kind of company the county needs, as it gives young folks real opportunities close to home so they don't have to leave the area to find meaningful work.

"We spend a lot of our time on workforce development in any number of arenas and with any number of various partners to try to advance that ball so we can get educated and skilled workers for our area businesses, whatever they are, and particularly in the trades," Griggs said.

Of course, Corrugated will be there every step of the way to accommodate future workforce development, with aims to build multiple large facilities for expansion down the road.

Already, the company is considering uses for a second 12,500-square-foot facility it erected adjacent to the new Heat Treat building, and the 40-year-old business is showing no signs of slowing down.

Corrugated Replacements began in 1981 when brothers Bob and Stan Lee started manually machining parts in their father's building in Riverdale. The Lees moved the company to Union County in 1997 to get out of Metro Atlanta, building a 50,000-square-foot facility in Blairsville.

The company has grown ever since, with each of its sister companies operating independently of one another today after having originated as a



These male slotter knives and much more are manufactured at North Georgia Heat Treat in Blairsville. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

division of Corrugated, including North Georgia Heat Treat that grew out of Corrugated's knife product line.

Heat Treat initially came to reside in the Industrial Park in 2015, a year after the Development Authority completed construction of two speculative buildings there utilizing an interest-free loan from the OneGeorgia Authority with the express intent to attract businesses to the county.

"The buildings were designed with assistance from TVA to provide maximum flexibility in how any potential tenant or buyer could utilize them," Griggs said. "The development strategy was successful, as in 2015, Corrugated Replacements leased one of the buildings and located its Heat Treat operation within it.

"In 2016 North Georgia Heat Treat purchased the facility as well as the remaining acreage on that tract of land in anticipation of expanding

its operations, which they've now accomplished with the construction of these two new 12,500-square-foot facilities."

Added Griggs, "The Development Authority is proud to have a company such as Corrugated Replacements in our community and looks forward to assisting with its continued growth and success."

And Corrugated's Chandler said the company is proud to be in Union County.

As the daughter of company Co-Founder Bob Lee, Chandler is intimately familiar with all things Corrugated; she ran her first machine when she was just 7 years old, and to this day, she can tell what's going on with a piece of equipment just by listening to it.

She's company president now, but she wasn't simply handed the keys to the kingdom. Chandler had to earn three college degrees, including a Master of Engineering, and apprentice in every area of the company, from international

sales to machining, to get where she is today.

Moving forward, Chandler said Corrugated will continue to expand its manufacturing capabilities. The company already has most of the market share for corrugated replacement parts, so Chandler is augmenting the main business by making many other kinds of parts.

"We're looking at government contracts and different certifications that we can get into," Chandler said. "We have an aerospace contract right now. We cut parts for BMW. We've made heat shields for missiles for the government. So, we hope to do more contracting like that.

"A lot of how we've gotten into things is just by somebody saying, 'Hey, do you do this?' And we don't say no. We're just like, 'Yeah, we do that,' and then figure out how we're going to do it."

For more information, visit <http://corrugatedreplacements.com> and <http://ngaheattreat.com>.



The two 12,500 square foot buildings in the foreground are new to Corrugated Replacements off Commerce Way, with the one next to Heat Treat to serve as an expanded area for the corrugated knife business. Photo by Shawn Jarrard