

Monday, December 03, 2007

## StressCrete breaks ground on new plant

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Reporter

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Dignitaries and onlookers gathered Thursday to celebrate the groundbreaking of the \$8 million StressCrete pole manufacturing plant west of Atchison. The near-50,000-square-foot plant facility site is located at 14503 Wallick Road in the Shannon Industrial Park.

StressCrete General Manager Royce Fawcett said corporate officials expect manufacturing operations to begin in October 2008 with 30 to 40 employees. The plant is set to manufacture the spun aggregate concrete poles mostly sold for commercial use or to municipalities for lighting public infrastructures.

"We're growing and continuing to add staff," Mr. Fawcett said, adding that he expects to start expanding his staff after the first of the year.

"Up until now we handled sales and customer service," he added.

Currently the staff consists of Matt Lacey, the recently hired plant manager; Mike Wilburn, of Everest, who serves as the plant engineer and customer relations; Shirleen Fawcett, who works in the reception area and customer service; Joe Butner Jr., who serves as sales representative; and Reid Hjelmaas, who officially joins the sales department on Monday.

Accounts throughout 16 states are served from the Atchison office, which was established in 2002 downtown. Later a new office facility was built and, in August 2004 the office relocated to its current location

During the groundbreaking ceremony, Secretary David D. Kerr, of the Kansas Department of Commerce, welcomed the StressCrete Group manufacturing endeavor to Kansas. He said Kansas officials were "delighted" when the company established a sales office in Kansas.

"We're glad this day has come," Secretary Kerr said of the latest StressCrete endeavor in Kansas. "It will bring jobs and investments.



"We're delighted to have a company of your caliber," Secretary Kerr continued, adding he was reared in Ness City.

"The light poles in use there (in Ness City) are StressCrete," he added. The poles there were recently installed.

State Rep. Jerry Henry, D-Cummings, was on hand to turn a shovel of dirt for the occasion.

Rep. Henry said the StressCrete investment and commitment involved a lot of people who worked hard.

"We're here to help," he added.

Atchison Mayor Marianne Estes and Todd Caudle, president of the Atchison Area Chamber of Commerce, both congratulated Mr. Fawcett and expressed gratitude on behalf of the community.

"The corporate citizens are proud to have you here -- welcome," Mr. Caudle said.

Additionally, Mr. Fawcett recognized the efforts of Glenda Purkis, who formerly served as the Chamber's executive director.

He said despite her current absence in the Atchison community, Ms. Purkis was instrumental in the project.

Dennis Hine, president of Free Country Design and Construction, was introduced as the general contractor for the plant's construction.

Mr. Fawcett said Mr. Hine expects to hire area contractors to complete the project.

The StressCrete Group was established in 1953 and is considered a pioneer in the spun concrete field. StressCrete plants in Alabama and Ontario, Canada, along with the King Luminaire decorative metal poles and lighting packages comprise the group.

King Luminaire is based in Jefferson, Ohio.

Currently StressCrete products are used in the Atchison area. The products include the decorative black aggregate street lamp poles along the 700 block of Commercial Street and from the 400 block of Commercial Street and along the Riverfront area, the stadium light poles at Amelia Earhart Memorial Stadium, the light poles in the Wal-Mart SuperCenter parking lot and the short Bollard poles at some corners along Commercial Street.

Mr. Fawcett said eventually he expects to employ about 80 workers when the plant begins to manufacture during two shifts.

