

A tale of two plant tours



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On business

BUSINESS

Cross sets job fair in Plainfield

PLAINFIELD — More than 65 area employers covering a wide range of manufacturing, labor, health care, educational, retail and community services are set to participate in state Rep. Tom Cross' Jobs Fair.

The job fair will be from 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at Plainfield North High School, 12005 S. 248th Ave.

"Our jobs fair matches local job seekers with area employers who are looking to hire right now," Cross said. "I encourage everyone who's unemployed or under-employed to come check out all the job opportunities available here in our area."

Admission is free and no registration is necessary for job seekers.

Free workshops will also be offered, including "Stand Out Resumes" at 10 a.m., "Successful Interviewing" at 11 a.m. and "Master Your Job Search" at noon.

Resources on veterans' assistance, apprenticeship information and polishing your networking skills will also be offered.

For more information, call Cross' office at 815-254-0000 or visit www.tomcross.com.

While one manufacturing plant in Will County boils over with anger and adversity, another is celebrating a new beginning with tears and cheers.

I toured both plants in the past couple of weeks. First up was Peoria-based Caterpillar Inc.'s Joliet plant where a machinists strike is in its 48th day. Second was G&W Electric, which moved its global headquarters and manufacturing plant from its longtime home in Blue Island to Bolingbrook this year.

I was invited to tour Caterpillar Inc.'s Joliet plant, which is the company's global headquarters for its hydraulics operation, by company officials who wanted to show how well their replacement workforce was doing.

Inside the 1.3 million-square-foot plant, managers boasted that production was up higher than ever without its longtime workers. Outside the plant, workers who have given decades of their lives to Caterpillar were walking the picket line or trying to figure out how to pay bills on their \$150-a-week strike pay.

Machinists are wondering why they are being asked to give up



John Mueller (right), president and CEO of G&W Electric, and Bolingbrook Mayor Roger Claar point out faces in the crowd Tuesday before the ribbon cutting for the new G&W Electric headquarters in Bolingbrook.

| JOSEPH P. MEIER-SUN-TIMES MEDIA

more and more as the company announces record profits. Meanwhile, company officials are worried about rewarding shareholders and investing in a future that will be more globally competitive.

On Tuesday, I attended a ribbon cutting for G&W Electric's new 377,000-square-foot plant, which makes industrial-sized switch gears and fuses.

Employees there are almost giddy with delight at their new surroundings. Owner and chairman of the board John Mueller choked up with emotion several times during the ceremony.

This is the second time I've heard Mueller speak. Each time I was blown away by how much compassion and interest he has in his company's 600 employees. Mueller said he didn't move the

company out of Illinois, even though other states were much more welcoming, because he didn't want to lose workers.

"That's not how we operate," he said as he fought tears. "Our employees always come first."

During his speech, Mueller acknowledged many employees, including Joe Hills, who started with the company in 1955 and still works for G&W at the age of 75.

"(Mueller) knows everybody by name," said Hills' boss, Mike Gilliam, the maintenance manager. "It's probably the best company I've ever worked for. All of the employees are happy to come to work here."

There are many differences between the two companies. Caterpillar is publicly traded and G&W is privately held. Caterpillar

is union and G&W isn't.

I'm sure those differences and others account for some of the contrasts I saw this month. And Caterpillar isn't alone in its strife. U.S. companies have been shedding workers like fleas in recent years and cutting benefits so they can survive the Great Recession and its murky economic aftermath.

And maybe G&W Electric will hit a bump in the road some day and have to make tough choices, too, with regard to staffing and benefits.

But I suspect if John Mueller is still at the helm when that happens, he will do it with compassion and respect for his workers. And I don't think he would boast that things were better than ever without the people who got him there in the first place.

BUSINESS BRIEFS

Post office business day

JOLIET — The Joliet post office, 2000 McDonough St., will present a "Grow Your Business Day" workshop at 1 p.m. Wednesday.

The one-hour workshop will teach people how to promote their businesses using direct mail without the costs of mailing lists or permits. Attendees also will learn about the postal service's new Direct Mail Hub, a website that helps people tap into the marketing advantages of direct mail. Seating is limited. Register at usps.com/growyourbusinessdays.

Braidwood at full power

BRACEVILLE — Exelon Nuclear's Braidwood Generating Station is operating at 100 percent power, following a scheduled refueling outage that began April 15 and ended May 19.

About 1,500 workers completed more than 10,000 equipment maintenance tasks and upgrades in addition to replacing about one-third of the uranium fuel. Also, safety-related systems were enhanced and the Unit 1 plant process computer was replaced.

Quarry earns kudos

ROMEORVILLE — Hanson Material Service and its Romeoville Quarry were recognized for outstanding community involvement at an award presentation on May 22. The Illinois Association of Aggregate Producers presented its Community Relations Award to Plant Manager Steve Novak and Assistant Manager Bernie Townsend during a luncheon for their employees.

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