

# Manufacturing expansions add new jobs in Warren County



Mitsubishi Electric Automotive America is expanding its already-existing auto supply plant in Mason to meet demand.

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Manufacturing expansions in Warren County have the potential to create a total 350-plus new jobs over the next three years, adding to the broad-based economic growth experts are seeing throughout the Cincinnati region.

While the jobs are all various types of roles tied to manufacturing, they represent the consumer goods, automotive, steel and bioscience subsectors.

Multiple industries are hiring in Greater Cincinnati instead of just one or two, which creates more job opportunities for a variety of skill levels, said Mekael Teshome, an economist for PNC Financial Services Group Inc. PNC is forecasting overall employment growth for southwest Ohio in 2015 of 1.7 percent.

"We're entering a phase of self-sustaining expansion," Teshome said.

A manufacturing affiliate of Serta Simmons Bedding LLC is eyeing a relocation of its Forest Park manufacturing site to Monroe, closer to Interstate 75.

While the move would bring existing jobs with it, Serta could expand and also add 106 new positions in Monroe.

Mitsubishi Electric Automotive America Inc. is planning yet another expansion at its Mason facilities where it makes starters and alternators, which could create 100 new jobs.

The Serta and Mitsubishi projects came to light Monday after the Ohio Tax Credit Authority approved tax breaks for the business growth plans.

Monday's news joins last month's announcement that personalized medicine company Assurex Health will stay put in Mason, and build a new headquarters and laboratory including manufacturing operations in the city. Assurex Health, which already has approximately 240 employees, could add 150 more as a result of the project over the next three years, according to private development agency REDI Cincinnati.

That's not all. On Monday, AK Steel Holding Corp. also announced it will build a new \$36 million Research and Innovation Center in Middletown near the city's intersection of Ohio 122 and Interstate 75 in Warren County. It will replace the West Chester Twp.-based steelmaker's existing research center in Middletown that employs 75 researchers, scientists and engineers. A groundbreaking is expected by late spring or early summer this year.

Deals take months to finalize before they become public, and there are more deals in the pipeline, said Martin Russell, economic development director of Warren County.

"The timing of a lot of these things definitely I think shows businesses are willing to commit not only to themselves to continue to grow and they're willing to commit to Warren County," Russell said. "They've found Warren County is a great place to commit their capital."

The Serta relocation and growth plans represent the second major manufacturing project to commit to Monroe in the past year, said Jennifer Patterson, assistant to the city manager. Illinois-based UGN Inc. is building a 232,000-square-foot auto parts plant in Monroe that will add approximately 150 jobs when it opens for full production this year.

"The city continues to see strong interest in industrial properties throughout Monroe," Patterson said in a written statement. "Together with our regional partners, we market the city as being proactive in seeking development opportunities with the available land, buildings, and skilled employee pool to support those projects."

Mitsubishi Electric Automotive plans to break ground next month on a more than \$80 million building expansion in Mason as national auto sales climbed for five consecutive years in 2014 to 16.5 million new vehicles sold.

Mitsubishi will build an additional 156,000 square feet of manufacturing space onto its existing 400,000-square-foot Bethany Road factory, according to the city.

The total investment is expected to exceed \$80 million including the cost of upgrading property and equipment with construction set to be complete by the end of the year.

Additionally, the proposed project could create approximately 100 new full-time jobs and retain more than 450 existing jobs at the company, according to information provided by Mason's Economic Development Director Michele Blair.

The expansion is prompted by a new contract Mitsubishi secured with General Motors to produce alternators for the 2016 Cruze, according to information provided by Ohio Development Services Agency.

"This investment reinforces Mitsubishi Electric's commitment to help our customers increase production as they keep pace with growing auto sales in North America," said Nobuyuki Nakagaki, president of Mitsubishi Electric Automotive America, in a provided written statement.

To entice the automaker to choose Mason to expand, the Ohio Tax Credit Authority on Monday approved a 55 percent, 8-year Job Creation Tax Credit for Mitsubishi, which the company can only claim if it chooses to expand locally and add new jobs.

The Mason location is the headquarters for Mitsubishi's manufacturing of starters and alternators. This project has the possibility to mark Mitsubishi's eighth physical expansion since it first opened operations in Warren County in 1987, according to city records.