

THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

[SUBSCRIBE](#)

Pecan company moves into new facility

Jennifer Tanner
CNHI News Service

—
VALDOSTA -- Brands like Winn-Dixie, Russell Stovers, Nestle and Publix go nuts over the pounds of pecans that are shelled, sorted, inspected and then shipped by South Georgia Pecan Co.

As the largest pecan sheller in the Southeast, this Valdosta-based company has the capability of processing 160,000 pounds of pecans daily -- an amount that is still not enough to provide for the ever-increasing demand its product creates.

Three years ago, owner Jim Worn recognized the need for expansion and purchased the old Levi Strauss building off U.S. 84. Although he initially visited the facility to purchase some of its equipment, he quickly realized its benefits. This building was well-maintained by the Levi's corporation and offered more than 200,000 square feet as well as easy accessibility and exposure from a major highway.

Although it would take approximately \$10 million total and many years of work, moving to the new facility could potentially increase productivity by more than 30 percent.

Representatives of Levi's wanted their building's next owner to be a local company that would provide employment for at least some of its faithful workers. South Georgia Pecan Co. met these expectations. In fact, a few Levi's employees still remain.

Renovations started that year. The entire building was completely gutted, the floor was replaced, air-conditioning units were installed and many other aspects were improved.

Approximately 70 percent of the project is now complete. Manufacturing operations and some cold storage has moved to the new facility, leaving the office area to still be completed. Worn expects the 15,000 square feet of office space to be ready for employees by next summer.

Within two more years, the new facility will be fully operational, housing all manufacturing operations, office personnel and much of the cold storage. The company's gift shop/in-shell buying station at 403 E. Hill Ave. will remain the same and its main office/old production facility will be used for storage.

It took about one month to move the manufacturing operations from Lee Street to the new facility, but the transition went smoothly, according to Worn.

"I am pleased with the way my employees have pulled together and made this happen. We virtually had no problems at all," Worn said.

The new facility has already received a superior rating in 2005 by the American Institute of Baking. Its equipment is superior and the environment is much more pleasant for employees. After the facility is at 100 percent, South Georgia Pecan Co.'s production average of 50 million pounds of pecans a year should increase to 80 million pounds a year.

Steve Johnson with Allison Sheet Metal Co. was instrumental in the renovation process. He and his team worked around the clock to ensure deadlines were met and promised were kept. Worn also credits SunTrust Bank for their help in long term financing for the facility.

South Georgia Pecan Co. is in operation year-round, employing 90 people during their off season and 160 during the holiday period. It was opened by the Pearlman family of Valdosta in

1913 before being sold to Beatrice Foods in 1967.

The business became an industry leader and was sold to Ed Crane and Jim Worn in 1983. Its owners and employees have since maintained a commitment to quality and service that encourages growth and success.

For information about South Georgia Pecan Co. and its renovation of the Levi's building, call (229) 244-1321.

Copyright © 1999-2006 cnhi, inc.