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NEWS ARTICLE: Gainesville Times on November 8, 2011

King's Hawaiian up and running in Oakwood

Bakery will be fully operational in about 9 months



OAKWOOD — Mounds of bread flowed Monday along conveyor belts inside the new King's Hawaiian Bakery off H.F. Reed Industrial Parkway.

But the California-based company, which opened the Oakwood plant on Oct. 5, is still nine months or so from full operation.

"It takes, typically, quite a few weeks and months for a food plant to be making the quality you want," said John Linehan, executive vice president of strategy and business development.

"We have made some of that quality (of bread), but there is still a lot of (work to do). It's kind of like fine-tuning an instrument."

Linehan gave The Times a tour of the facility Monday afternoon, showing off operations around the 112,000-square-foot plant, which sits on 20 acres in the Oakwood South Industrial Park.

King's Hawaiian considered several Eastern states, including North Carolina and South Carolina, before settling on Georgia for its first plant east of the Mississippi River.

The company, along with area and state officials, including then-Gov. Sonny Perdue, announced in September 2010 that King's Hawaiian would settle in Oakwood.



The word then was that the company would create 126 jobs over two years and then an additional 100 jobs around 2015 at the bakery and distribution operation in Oakwood.

Those numbers are still fairly on track.

Linehan, whose office is at company headquarters in Torrance, Calif., said Monday the company hopes to have 70 employees at the plant by year's end and 150 by the end of 2012.

Eventually, the company will have about 250 to 260 workers.

In June, King's Hawaiian signed a job training agreement with Georgia Quick Start and Lanier Technical College.

The Technical College System of Georgia sponsors Quick Start as a way qualified businesses can get free customized workforce training.

Russell Vandiver, Lanier Tech president, has referred to King's Hawaiian as "a crown jewel in economic development."

"We're looking forward to a long-term relationship," he said at the time.

Linehan said King's Hawaiian was drawn to Hall County because "we were looking for a (place) where we could get people who share the company values."

"This is a family-owned business, and the workforce and the people who work in the company are really important to us," he said.

Linehan also said Georgia and Hall County seemed "very welcoming to businesses and jobs."

"While they hold companies accountable for being good corporate citizens, they also welcome them," he said.

Linehan said that Quick Start, in addition to providing customized training, "does a really good job of teaching new employees the culture of a company. ... I think people have felt more motivated and comfortable from day one. It's really fun to be a part of it."

Shelley Davis, vice president of existing industry for the Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce, said the company has really "benefited the (area's) economy and people."

"Plus, it's family focused. We're really fortunate to have those type of companies in Gainesville-Hall County."

The company has some large plans.

In about three years, it hopes to add a second production line.

The future also may lead to other operations.

"We are not a bread company. We're a Hawaiian food company that happens to make bread now," Linehan said. "It's very possible we could be making other food products on this property.

"We're using 10 acres now. We bought 20 acres on purpose."