

CURTIS WIRE PRODUCTS COMPANY

Petoskey, Emmet County, Michigan

Petoskey News Review
November 25, 1959

Curtis Wire Making 82 Different Items and Expanding Plant Here

Curtis Wire Products is in the midst of an expansion program and the 221 x 30 foot addition will increase the plant capacity to 30,000 square feet, Manager Ed Sobleskey said.

Curtis Wire which has had no period of lay-offs in two years, is currently employing 45 persons and is operating some Saturdays and Sundays to keep up with orders. Employment averages 25 to 30 people most of the time, was up to as high as 86 once.

Sobleskey said the company has a adequate supply of steel and expects another shipment this week from American Steel and Wire of Chicago. During the recent strike, it received some from Continental Steel of Kokomo which was working. Curtis used five million pounds of wire this year, about three million last year.

He was host yesterday to members of the Petoskey Klwanis Club and took them on a tour of the Charlevoix-ave. plant.

"1960 looks good," he said. "Our production has been increasing every year since the company started here in 1947 except for 1957 (the year of the recession) and our jobs have been holding up well." The appliance business is good prior to Christmas, he explained.

Curtis Wire makes 82 different items, he said, and this calls for considerable tearing down and setting up for different types of production.

At the present time they are supplying Kelvinator (American Motors) of Grand Rapids, Norge of Muskegon, Sun Ray of Delaware, O., and Moffats of Canada. Most are refrigerator shelves, stove shelves and baskets.

Sobleskey said Curtis also makes floral coolers and has several other small accounts. In different years it has supplied Gibson and Ranney refrigerators.

While Curtis Wire hauls its own production on its own trucks, it has the wire hauled in. Most of this is via Parker Motor Freight. Sobleskey said the company trucks carry a capacity of 31,000 pounds of production in shipping crates which are built in Petoskey. One truck uses 112 of these crates and in the fall, about 300 are built a month.

THE NEW ADDITION, due to be completed about Jan 1, will provide more space for a bank of welding units and will give additional storage space. It will also include a 15 foot wide loading dock for trucks which also bring in about 32,000 pounds of light gauge wire every five days. The company manager is optimistic about business conditions for 1960.

Petoskey News-Review
Friday, August 6, 1990

Curtis Wire keeps doors open few more months

By PERRY CLARK
News-Review staff writer

Workers at Curtis Wire Products Co. expected to be in the unemployment office or pounding the pavement looking for work this week, but instead find themselves employed for another two months or more.

"The store's still open," Curtis president William Reddig said Thursday.

The plant was scheduled to close April 1, but management has decided to keep it open until around June 1.

"It could go beyond June or it could be earlier," Reddig said. "I'll just see."

He said chances were slim to none the company would stay open beyond June 1, however.

"It's a long, lung shot," he said. About 25 people are still working, Reddig said. Customer demand for refrigerator shelves has kept the plant open.

Curtis management met last

week with the bargaining committee for UAW Local 610, which represents Curtis workers. At that time management presented some proposals and told the committee the plant would remain open until about June 1 and perhaps beyond, union vice president Bernie Thompson said.

"We don't know if it's going past that or not," Thompson said. "Right now we're in limbo. We don't know how long we're going to work."

The union's contract is up May 1, but Thompson said there were indications the contract would be renegotiated if the plant stayed open beyond June 1. Workers agreed to a wage freeze a year ago in an effort to keep the plant open.

Extension of their jobs has some negative aspects for employees.

Thompson said it's difficult to arrange financing for major purchases when you don't know if you're going to have a job or not. It also cuts into the time workers have to search for another job, as

well as preventing them from giving prospective employers a firm starting date.

Tim Goodrich, a 22-year veteran at Curtis, expressed mixed emotions.

"It's nice to continue working and getting a paycheck, but if they're going to close I wish they would just close the doors and get on with it," Goodrich said. "If not ... move the machinery back and continue operating."

The firm has been shipping machinery to a plant in Newport, Tenn., for about a year.

Goodrich said employees would like more definitive information than they have received, and aren't convinced they are getting straight answers from management.

"They gave us an answer once and we were pretty well satisfied; closing April 1st," Goodrich said.

"Then April 1st comes along and we're still working. I don't know what the deal is. They won't guar-

See CURTIS, page 2

Curtis Wire stays open

CURTIS

Continued from page 1

Reddig said there is simply no way to know exactly when the firm will close.

"It's something that goes day by day or week by week depending on

what the customers' needs are," Reddig said.

Workers suspect Curtis has remained open because the Tennessee plant was not able to supply sufficient quantities of the product yet.

"Maybe it's just a gimmick to break the union or make us work for less wages," Thompson added.

OUR OPINION

Curtis Wire's closing is blow to local economy

THE APPARENT CLOSING OF CURTIS WIRE PRODUCTS Co. April 1 in Petoskey is somber news.

Rumors about the closing of the long-time Petoskey business which employs 35-50 people and has an annual payroll of about \$1 million have circulated for months. Now, apparently, the final decision has been made.

In the whole scheme of things, the loss of 50 jobs may not seem like a lot in a labor force of nearly 24,000, with about 21,000 employed, in Emmet and Charlevoix counties.

But the Curtis Wire positions were considered 50 stable, family-supporting jobs. The incomes of those families in turn circulated throughout the community, funding the jobs of those providing medical, educational, legal and repair services, food, clothing, cars, refrigerators, TVs and VCRs. Economists say \$1 turns over as many as seven times in a community.

Emmet County was rocked more than a decade ago by the loss of nearly 200 jobs when Penn-Dixie closed its doors. It took a long time to come up with replacements. Some say those jobs have yet to be replaced in the community, that instead of industrial based jobs, the replacements were service based.

Steps have been taken to improve the job climate. The Northern Lakes Economic Growth Alliance is working with Emmet, Charlevoix and Antrim counties to retain and expand the industrial base.

But Northern Michigan residents seem split on this idea.

The area can't seem to decide what the job base should be or if it wants manufacturing jobs at all. Growth — any type of growth — is a concern for some.

Talk of adding industrial jobs creates fear of pollution and development of a big city atmosphere — things that would destroy the reason why many have chosen to live here.

Without diversity, we will die.

As master plans are revised in the area and community forums are held to review the efforts, serious consideration needs to be given to the industrial sector.

The loss of Curtis Wire won't be easy on the economic health of Northwest Michigan.

"Our Opinion" represents the views of the News-Review Editorial Board. Serving on the board are News-Review staffers Bob Clock, Jim Heil, Paula Holmes-Greeley, Kirk Schaller, Kendall P. Stanley and Ken Winter.

Monday, March 12, 1990

*Petoskey News-Review
Friday, August 6, 1990*