

Corrugated Replacements to expand Heat Treat, hire workers

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

BLAIRSVILLE - Local manufacturing powerhouse Corrugated Replacements, Inc. is expanding its facilities at North Georgia Heat Treat and taking applications for multiple positions inside the company.

So, what does Corrugated Replacements do? At its core, the company helps corrugated box plants maintain machinery by supplying replacement parts and offering other services like on-site rebuilds.

In a nutshell, the company makes all the parts that make boxes and keeps the machines running, too.

But Corrugated Replacements does so much more, including custom and highly specialized projects for thousands of clients all over the globe, with a total of eight sister companies based right here in Union County, including North Georgia Heat Treat.

Business has taken off amid COVID-19, as the surge in online shopping has ramped up the need for shipping boxes. The current expansion is occurring at Heat Treat, which manufactures corrugated knives and cuts any number of custom metal jobs using lasers and CNC machining.

Located off Commerce Way in the Blairsville Airport Industrial Park, the primary reason for Heat Treat's expansion is to separate the company's heating and cutting machinery into two buildings.

Historically, the business has operated out of a single facility, but separating the equipment will allow for one "clean" and one "dirty" building, as the heating equipment produces soot and dust that can cause issues with the cutting equipment over time.

To accomplish this, Corrugated has erected a new 12,500-square-foot facility next to the main Heat Treat building that the company purchased from the Union County Development Authority in 2016.

Heat Treat will be ready to move into the new building as soon as a second coat of sealant has been applied to the floor and the parking lot is completed, likely sometime in the next couple of months.

Fortunately for Union County, the expansion will mean new jobs to the area above and beyond what Corrugated is already hiring for, with positions available companywide in engineering, accounting, sales, human resources, machining and more.

"We definitely have to hire more employees," Corrugated President Jenny Chandler said. "We're always looking for employees - I can't find enough right now. And we want to find local people before we outsource."

"Especially for Heat Treat, where we've had some people that have worn multiple hats out of necessity, having it in two separate buildings, I'll have to hire since they'll be separated."

"I'm always taking applications, and I hire every high school kid that puts in an application. We do the Work-Based Learning with the high school, and if you graduate high school and go to any college that is going to benefit Corrugated in your job, we give you a 100% scholarship."

"So, whether it's tech school, whether it's engineering at Georgia Tech - it doesn't matter. You just have to sign a contract that says you're going to pass or you have to pay for it, and you'll work three years after you graduate."

Corrugated is big on creating opportunities for people, which translates to happy employees and very low turnover. Education is a major part of the investment the company makes in its employees, which also includes the availability of a two-year in-house apprenticeship program.

"And you don't have to have a high school degree for that," Chandler said. "We start you, and you go through every area of our shop. It is recognized by the state, so there's pay along with it."

"It's very structured, you have to pass exams at the end of your time in that department in order to move onto the next department. And those have turned out to be our most valuable employees; our plant



Corrugated Replacements Inc. President Jenny Chandler and Development Authority Director Mitch Griggs are often in contact regarding local economic opportunities, pictured here inside the new Heat Treat building. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

manager for Heat Treat was my first apprentice that went through."

Additionally, Chandler is a voting member on the Union County College and Career Academy Governing Board, which will be an important pipeline for students graduating from area schools to find local job opportunities to build up the community even more in the future.

"I hope the College and Career Academy is going to show kids you don't always have to get a four-year degree to make a wonderful living; you can stay in Union County and learn trades," Chandler said. "Trades are dying because everybody thinks they need to get a four-year degree."

"So, I'm hoping it will bring other students in because it's open to other counties. And then, I hope that it will show people here that haven't been exposed to any of those opportunities what they can do."

Union County Development Authority Executive Director Mitch Griggs said Corrugated Replacements is a prime example of the kind of company the county needs, as it gives young folks real opportunities close to home so they don't have to leave the area to find meaningful work.

"We spend a lot of our time on workforce development in any number of arenas and with any number of various partners to try to advance that ball so we can get educated and skilled workers for our area businesses, whatever they are, and particularly in the trades," Griggs said.

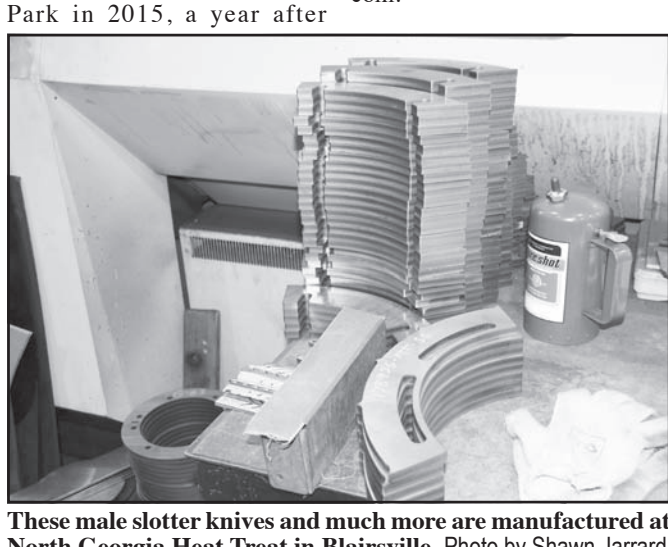
Of course, Corrugated will be there every step of the way to accommodate future workforce development, with aims to build multiple large facilities for expansion down the road.

Already, the company is considering uses for a second 12,500-square-foot facility it erected adjacent to the new Heat Treat building, and the 40-year-old business is showing no signs of slowing down.

Corrugated Replacements began in 1981 when brothers Bob and Stan Lee started manually machining parts in their father's building in Riverdale. The Lees moved the company to Union County in 1997 to get out of Metro Atlanta, building a 50,000-square-foot facility in Blairsville.

The company has grown ever since, with each of its sister companies operating independently of one another today after having originated as a division of Corrugated, including North Georgia Heat Treat that grew out of Corrugated's knife product line.

Heat Treat initially came to reside in the Industrial Park in 2015, a year after



These male slotter knives and much more are manufactured at North Georgia Heat Treat in Blairsville. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

spraying things down with disinfectants," Youngblood said. "We limited the amount of equipment used in the weight room, and I am getting ready to open everything back up."

"We don't want to jump the gun. We did good, and we only had a few cancellations in the basketball season due to COVID, and we were able to

the Development Authority completed construction of two speculative buildings there utilizing an interest-free loan from the OneGeorgia Authority with the express intent to attract businesses to the county.

"The buildings were designed with assistance from TVA to provide maximum flexibility in how any potential tenant or buyer could utilize them," Griggs said. "The development strategy was successful, as in 2015, Corrugated Replacements leased one of the buildings and located its Heat Treat operation within it."

"In 2016 North Georgia Heat Treat purchased the facility as well as the remaining acreage on that tract of land in anticipation of expanding its operations, which they've now accomplished with the construction of these two new 12,500-square-foot facilities."

Added Griggs, "The Development Authority is proud to have a company such as Corrugated Replacements in our community and looks forward to assisting with its continued growth and success."

And Corrugated's Chandler said the company is proud to be in Union County.

As the daughter of company Co-Founder Bob Lee, Chandler is intimately familiar with all things Corrugated; she ran her first machine when she was just 7 years old, and to this day, she can tell what's going on with a piece of equipment just by listening to it.

She's company president now, but she wasn't simply handed the keys to the kingdom. Chandler had to earn three college degrees, including a Master of Engineering, and apprentice in every area of the company, from international sales to machining, to get where she is today.

Moving forward, Chandler said Corrugated will continue to expand its manufacturing capabilities. The company already has most of the market share for corrugated replacement parts, so Chandler is augmenting the main business by making many other kinds of parts.

"We're looking at government contracts and different certifications that we can get into," Chandler said. "We have an aerospace contract right now. We cut parts for BMW. We've made heat shields for missiles for the government. So, we hope to do more contracting like that."

"A lot of how we've gotten into things is just by somebody saying, 'Hey, do you do this?' And we don't say no. We're just like, 'Yeah, we do that,' and then figure out how we're going to do it."

For more information, visit <http://corrugatedreplacements.com> and <http://ngaheattreat.com>.

Vaccine Eligibility...from Page 1A

that, as supply increased and we vaccinated more and more high-risk Georgians, the state would move to expand eligibility. This week, Georgia received over 450,000 vaccines. That includes both first and second doses. While we do not have a specific number yet, we have been told to expect an increase in both Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson next week.

"Due to the uneven demand Public Health officials and private providers are experiencing in different regions of the state, the Department of Public Health directed approximately 70% of this week's total vaccine allotment to the North Georgia and Metro Atlanta areas to put more supply where demand is highest."

Dr. Toomey serves as the commissioner of the Georgia Department of Public Health, and she gave an update on the state's COVID-19 outlook in the March 23 presser, relaying that "our numbers are still looking very, very good."

"Positivity has averaged for the last seven days 5.4%, and we hope that that can continue to stay low and will get lower," Toomey said. "Hospitalizations and deaths are down to about 40% over the last 14 days, which is very, very good statistic."

She encouraged everyone who is eligible to get vaccinated and stressed that all three of the emergency-use authorized vaccines - Moderna, Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson - were "safe and effective."

"They will be our key to allowing us to open Georgia as a state and enjoy those freedoms we so are missing at this time," Dr. Toomey said,

advising further that people should continue to follow COVID best practices like wearing masks in public and avoiding large gatherings.

Kemp said last week he and Toomey would be looking at removing remaining restrictions on businesses and other entities, many of which have been in place effectively since his initial March 14, 2020, executive order declaring a Public Health State of Emergency for COVID-19.

The governor has renewed the Public Health State of Emergency 12 times since then, with the current executive order set to expire after April 6 unless extended.

Among the remaining provisions are "shelter in place" requirements for people with chronic illnesses; mandated COVID-19 mitigation measures in businesses and other organizations; restrictions like distancing in movie theaters and capacity limits at live venues; and more.

"Hardworking Georgians can't endure another year like the last," Kemp said Friday. "Next week, we'll roll out our plan to loosen the remaining COVID restrictions in the state. Georgians know the right thing to do. We are open. We have been open, and we're ready to welcome you to the Peach State."

Fortunately, the regional COVID situation is as good as Kemp and Toomey describe at the state-level, such that both the Union County and Chatuge Regional Nursing Homes have re-opened for visitors following updated guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Both nursing homes

opened for visitation (Thursday) with visitors scheduled in one-hour increments," Union General Chief Nursing Officer Julia Barnett said. "They will hold visitation several times per week."

"The families are socially distanced in a common room unless the resident has a private room. There were many happy tears today from residents, families, and even staff after a long year of restricted visitation."

Also on the home front, Synergy Health of Hiawassee was happy to capitalize right away on expanded eligibility by hosting a vaccine clinic for about 180 people at Young Harris College on March 25, featuring some staff but mostly students.

Dr. Samuel "Le" Church was thrilled to see the level of participation for the clinic, which was pulled together and announced quickly, and he looks forward to additional public health partnerships with the college and potentially other institutions down the road.

He asks that people who are getting vaccinated reach out to their family, friends and neighbors about receiving one also, as Dr. Church believes "word of mouth" advertising is a good way to increase vaccine uptake.

Synergy Health was going to be slowing down its vaccination efforts prior to Kemp's announcement last week, but now that eligibility has opened up, vaccine administration has gotten more efficient, so people may continue to sign up for Synergy vaccination at ngvax.com.

RidgeRunner...from Page 1A

because it was a bunch of workers just talking to each other and nothing to do. We wanted to help the restaurants and the customers and the people who were quarantined in their home and couldn't get out to go get food.

"We wanted to also help the restaurant employees who went from making money from tips to not. We knew if we could get them on the road, we could put them back to work as servers."

This Friday will make a year that RidgeRunner has been in service, and in that time, Kirkland has heard many testimonials from restaurants that are thriving right alongside RidgeRunner.

"We have had restaurants come up to us and say that if it wasn't for us, then they wouldn't be here today," Kirkland said. "That is really rewarding and makes us feel like we have accomplished the mission that we set out to do a year ago."

"We have paid out over \$1 million to restaurants in the past year, so I definitely feel like we have contributed to some of the success and

rebounding they have done."

RidgeRunner Takeout has grown immensely since its inception, serving the areas and people between Jasper and Clayton in Georgia, up into Hayesville, North Carolina, with a location in Dablonega coming soon.

Now, Kirkland is focusing on expanding the business and bringing in even more people and opportunities to support the communities and restaurants of North Georgia.

"We have about 95 local drivers," Kirkland said. "We also have four, soon to be five, territory owners who serve their areas. We have 19 dispatchers in our call center, which is located in Tampa, Florida."

The territory model keeps RidgeRunner Takeout local, which Kirkland believes explains much of the company's success in its first year.

"We are locally owned, and I think that is important," Kirkland said. "Even as we grow, we are going to continue to bring on the local owners, and that makes the difference when you are not having to

call a 1-800 number to get something taken care of."

"It helps the restaurants, too, because we are just a text or phone call away if they need to change something or update prices or anything they need to do. I think that is important, and it is something that we try to focus on."

Soon, RidgeRunner will be offering a rideshare program to residents in the North Georgia Mountains, which is something Kirkland said he is "super excited about."

"We spent a lot of money in developing and getting that to be as close to Uber and Lyft as possible," Kirkland said. "If you pull other apps up and ours up, you wouldn't be able to tell much of a difference besides the branding."

To use RidgeRunner Takeout for local restaurants like Skillet Café in Blairsville and Asiano in Hiawassee, download the easy-to-use app or visit RidgeRunnerTakeout.com, where prospective employees may also apply to deliver. And keep an eye out for RidgeRunner Rideshare.

County Meeting...from Page 1A

Hayden, and the rest of the guests in the March 16 county meeting were Historical Society President Sandra Green and Vice President Jerry Taylor. Together, the local history buffs unveiled the painting, which had been covered with a sheet, for those gathered.

"The thing about this, it's not just a painting - it is a representation of so much that was going on when the dam was built," Green said.

Breaking down the name of the piece, Hayden spoke of the "Vanishing Heritage" as underscoring the fact that, for the subject of the painting, "everything's being taken away."

In addition to the "Fear of the Future" standing for the unknowns of an uprooted life, upon closer inspection, one can see that, below the main headline outlining the TVA's work in the Towns County Herald newspaper the woman is holding, it reads: "The United States declares war on Japan."

The painting also features a picture of a Confederate soldier hanging on the interior wall of the cabin, which Hayden envisioned as one of the woman's relations who probably died as a result of the Civil War.

"In a way," Taylor said, "it represents the past with the soldier, the present with the lady looking out the window seeing what's happening, and the future, as you know what happened."

And Hayden's artistic vision does not end there. He even incorporated another "victim of the lake" in the frame of the painting, covering the handmade frame with bark from a dogwood tree he had discovered in Lake Chatuge.

People will be able to see

the donated painting hanging in the main Historical Society meeting room once members begin gathering again. The society hasn't met since March 2020, though meetings are tentatively scheduled to resume starting the second Monday in May.

"That's our goal, anyway," Green said. "We will be following the (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) for whatever is required at that time."

The artist is already hard at work on finishing touches for his next painting regarding a depiction of local sorghum production.

"I understand that Union County had more to do with the sorghum than anything, but this painting represents the ingenuity of the mountain folks," Hayden said. "It's going to be, they built this apparatus that they're feeding the cane through and processing the cane."

Also in the meeting, Bradshaw conducted several items of new business, including signing a contract with a company called ATLAS for monitoring services at the landfill. Such services are required by state law and are meant to safeguard groundwater and monitor methane emissions.

Additionally, Bradshaw reappointed Raburne Wilson to the Towns County Board of the Division of Family & Children Services, a role in which Wilson has served for many years. Bradshaw thanked him "for his time and his efforts in representing Towns County on the board."

Next, the commissioner opened a single bid for an inoperable backhoe that has been at the landfill for a long time, and it sold for \$1,000.

Wrapping up new business, Bradshaw renewed an annual mutual aid agreement with the Georgia Forestry Commission specifying how and with what equipment GFC would contribute toward assisting the Towns County Fire Department in its firefighting efforts.

During public comments, Hamilton Gardens Board President Gordy Jones offered gardens updates, inviting everyone to come see the new West Lawn, which is being named after recent donor Peggy West-Driskell, and the upcoming bloom season.

The annual "A Blooming Affair" at the gardens will take place April 17 through May 23, to coincide with the always popular rhododendron and azalea plant sale.

Speaking on upcoming projects, Bradshaw said plans were still being drawn up for courthouse SPOST renovations, and as far as improving Shake Rag Road on the way to Bell Mountain Park, the commissioner said he'd be getting letters to Shake Rag residents soon detailing plans.

Addressing road litter concerns, the commissioner thanked the Towns County Sheriff's Office for supplying a local inmate detail to pick up trash, a job previously done by Colwell Probation Detention Center detainee crews before the start of the pandemic.

As previously reported, Bradshaw welcomed the Towns County Indians Basketball Team to the March county meeting to congratulate the young student-athletes for winning the Georgia High School Association Class A Public State Championship.

Egg Hunt...from Page 1A

priority for local government and the Rec Department over the past year, as Youngblood and his staff have continued to promote good health with exercise at the Rec Center, which is also hosting daily vaccine administrations.

"We have done a very good job at trying to keep things as clean as we can and

spraying things down with disinfectants," Youngblood said. "We limited the amount of equipment used in the weight room, and I am getting ready to open everything back up."

"We don't want to jump the gun. We did good, and we only had a few cancellations in the basketball season due to COVID, and we were able to

keep the doors open the entire time. Some of the surrounding counties either shut their season off early or even completely."

Youngblood hopes to have everything open again soon and encourages the community to check in at the Rec Center for how to participate in recreational sports this year.