

Kysor/Warren to expand, hire 200

Ledger-Enquirer

June 26, 2010

BY ANDREA HERNANDEZ

ahernandez@ledger-enquirer.com

<http://www.ledger-enquirer.com/2010/06/26/1173691/kysorwarren-to-expand-hire-200.html>

After an influx of orders earlier this year, refrigeration equipment manufacturer Kysor/Warren will expand its Columbus operations and add about 200 employees to its payroll.

The locally based company, which makes commercial refrigeration systems and display cases for supermarkets, recently signed a 10-year lease agreement to use a Columbus warehouse for shipping and storage. Now it is seeking to fill 200 positions — mostly for manufacturing workers.

The jobs come at a time when the Columbus metro area unemployment rate stands at 9.2 percent — a little lower than the jobless rate of 9.3 percent a month before. About 11,940 residents in the metro area are without jobs, according to the Georgia Department of Labor.

Beth Ferguson, Kysor/Warren director of human resources, said the company is seeking production workers such as brazers, welders, sheet metal workers and material handlers. The business — which supplies its products to clients such as Walmart, Winn Dixie and Food Lion — now employs about 800 full-time and temporary workers in Columbus. Officials are hoping to reach 1,000 by the fall.

Pay for production workers will range from \$12.83 to \$14.80 per hour. Kysor/Warren also plans to hire a number of engineers, who will be paid depending on experience.

The announcement comes after mass hiring efforts at Kysor/Warren this past spring. The company, a division of Wisconsin-based Manitowoc Company, announced in April it was looking to hire 150 production workers. Ferguson said they received more than 1,000 applications for those positions.

Officials said business has turned a corner since the beginning of 2009. After seeing order declines last year, the company was forced to lay off about 10 percent of its salaried work force. For several months, hourly employees had to soldier through reduced hours as well, said Kysor/Warren President Jim Laycock.

“The commercial refrigeration business had a tough year last year, like other businesses in the U.S.,” said Jim Knudsen, vice president of sales and marketing at Kysor/Warren. “With the economy struggling, we used that to position ourselves.”

Throughout 2009, the company worked to build market share and add new products, including environmentally friendly refrigeration units. This includes their STRATUS line, which consists of customizable display cases that reduce energy use by more than 15 percent. One of Kysor/Warren’s competitors also went out of business last year.

Kysor/Warren to expand, hire 200

Officials said they believe those factors — coupled with relatively improved economic conditions in 2010 — have resulted in the demand they're currently seeing for their products.

“It certainly appears that supermarkets are starting to spend more money now than they have been,” said Laycock, adding that the spending is mostly on renovation projects rather than new construction.

The company president said business is up more than 30 percent this year, and order rates this spring have doubled over last year. The company has also been able to re-hire a number of employees it laid off in 2009.

Kysor/Warren's new Jamesson Road warehouse — formerly occupied by Char-Broil — is expected to be fully operational by August and should allow the manufacturer to double the size of its shipping operations in Columbus. The company also plans to increase production capacity by 15 percent at its Transport Boulevard location, Laycock said.

“We believe we will continue to grow our market share,” he said. “I think we would say we're cautiously optimistic.”

Kysor/Warren is one of several brands owned by publicly-traded parent firm The Manitowoc Company, a multi-industry capital goods manufacturer with more than 100 manufacturing and service facilities in 27 countries. The company owns several brands within the construction lifting equipment and commercial food service equipment industries.

In April, Manitowoc reported sales of \$721.9 million for the first quarter of 2010 — a 29.7 percent decline compared to the same period a year ago. Officials said the decrease was mostly due to a 45.5 percent drop in its crane segment. Sales in its food service segment, which includes Kysor/Warren, were flat.

“We continue to see significant potential for organic growth in all areas of our food service business and have witnessed an increasing number of positive signs in our end markets, including same-store sales increases, as well as traffic and revenue improvements,” Glen E. Tellock, Manitowoc chairman and chief executive officer, said in its earnings report. “While many of our markets continue to be challenged, we believe that our continued focus on innovation and technologically superior products will enable us to maintain our leadership position in our food service segment. They will also be a key driver of revenue growth and continued strong margins.”