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Company decides to stay in Medina

Bernzomatic to get state and federal aid

By FRED O. WILLIAMS
News Business Reporter
10/31/2006

Torch maker Bernzomatic will keep its Medina plant open - reversing its plan to move production to China - in return for \$625,000 in state and federal aid, officials announced Monday.

The company's decision will preserve about 213 jobs and create 32 new ones over three years, according to U.S. Rep. Thomas M. Reynolds and Gov. George Pataki, who announced the aid package on Monday.

A unit of Irwin Industrial Tool Co., Bernzomatic makes hand-held gas torches at the Orleans County factory, about 25 miles east of Niagara Falls.

The company had announced plans this spring to phase out production in Medina in 2007 and shift production to Shanghai, China.

Instead it will invest \$1 million in upgrades and new equipment.

Reynolds said the switch shows that upstate New York can compete in a global economy, in a statement apparently aimed at his anti-globalism opponent, businessman Jack Davis.

"Today's decision displays that if we choose to be part of the modern economy and believe in Western New York workers, we will succeed and jobs will come home," Reynolds' statement said.

With a week to go before election day, the Davis campaign shot back with a statement blaming trade agreements for undermining the company in the first place.

For Reynolds to trumpet the saving of jobs "is like an arsonist taking credit for calling the fire department," Davis spokesman Curtis Ellis said.

Bernzomatic is eligible for up to \$400,000 from the state Empire State Development Corp. and \$175,000 from the Governor's Office of Small Cities, Pataki said. The Empire State Development grant is tied to investment in renovation and machinery.

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Another \$50,000 in federal aid is available in two training grants through the U.S. Labor Department, Reynolds said.

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The federal **Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development Initiative** targets areas with low wages and employment levels and slow job creation. In all, upstate New York is eligible for \$15 million from the program, Reynolds said.

The award will improve the region's work force and attract employers, Reynolds' statement said.

Company officials could not be reached Tuesday to discuss their reasons for changing plans.

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Bernzomatic is a unit of Irwin Industrial Tool Co. based in North Carolina, part of the Atlanta-based Newell Rubbermaid conglomerate.

In a statement from Gov. Pataki, Irwin Hand Tools Division President Bob Heisner said the company is glad it can remain in Medina, where workers are experts on torch production. "We are very grateful to the state of New York and the local government whose assistance has helped make this possible," the statement said.

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