

Wyeth begins Albany operations

Sixty Procter & Gamble workers will become Wyeth employees over the next year.

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ALBANY — With the sale of Thermacare-brand heat wraps complete, Wyeth Consumer Healthcare executives were in Albany Thursday to begin the transition of manufacturing operations from Procter & Gamble to Wyeth.

Wyeth, the maker of pain reliever Advil, closed on a deal Tuesday to acquire the brand and the Albany manufacturing facility where Thermacare has been produced since 2001, Senior Vice President Peter T. Bigelow said.

"As of now, the product known as Thermacare is owned by Wyeth," he said. "We wanted to come out here and talk to the employees. (They) are still P&G employees, but over the next 6-12 months, they will become Wyeth employees."

Wyeth purchased the plant, which adjoins Procter & Gamble's Albany facility where Bounty paper towels and Charmin tissue are made.

Bigelow, in Albany Thursday with Wyeth Consumer Healthcare President Caven Redmond, said the purpose of the visit was to educate the plant's 60-70 employees about the transition, "celebrate a little bit and recognize the fact that this is a big milestone for us."

At Wyeth "our marketing folks know the pain market very well," Bigelow said. "We think Thermacare will really compliment it extremely well, and we think it's a product that has a lot of growth potential, both inside the U.S. and outside the U.S."

Approximately 60 full-time employees were asked to become Wyeth employees and are joined at the plant by about 30 other temporary workers employed there.

While Wyeth plans to step up marketing and production of the Thermacare brand, Bigelow said growth in Albany depends on the product's success.

"We're going to grow the business, and indicators of that are we'll be busier here that we were before," he said. "Does that mean people will have to work overtime, that we'll have to bring some more people in? All those things could happen. That would be what we've intended."

Wyeth plans to expand Thermacare outside the United States, "and our intention is to supply the whole global need for this product from right here in Albany," Bigelow said.

Kenyatta Sherrod will remain the top executive in charge of Thermacare operations in Albany, Bigelow said.

After a meeting with the Wyeth executives, Bobby McKinney, interim executive director of the Albany-Dougherty Economic Development Commission, praised the arrival of another Fortune 500 company in Albany.

"Wyeth is a world-class organization — they're a real plus coming into our community ... especially as they grow this product to an even bigger and better brand," McKinney said.

"This is really special," added Jeff Sinyard, chair of the Dougherty County Commission. "We could be down here today closing the doors, and 90 people wouldn't have jobs. Their worldwide global president was here today and he likes Georgia, especially the work force in Albany and Southwest Georgia."

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