

Whitlock to close its doors in October

By Chris Rizk
Staff writer

When management at Whitlock Inc. in Farmington Hills met with employees last December to bring them the somber news of a potential plant closing, they faced blank stares and a lot of questions.

Most of the inquiries centered around why a company that manufactures auxiliary equipment for the plastics industry would close its doors when sales and volume were up.

"The workers couldn't, still can't, understand it," said Sheet Metal Workers International, Local 30 union steward Elton Monroe. "We're talking about a business that's profitable. It doesn't make sense."

Workers at the plant, at 23231 N. Industrial Park Drive, were told in January the potential closing had become a reality.

More than 150 workers, including salaried employees, will be affected by the closing, scheduled for October 1987. Less than 10 percent will be transferred to the Chicago area, where the company plans to consolidate operations and reduce overhead costs.

A subsidiary of AEC Inc. in Illinois, the consolidation was prompted by the need to strengthen the company, said Whitlock vice president Richard Demmings.

'The workers couldn't, still can't, understand it.'
— Elton Monroe, union steward

IT IS a situation, Monroe said, that he has witnessed more than once. An eight-year employee of Whitlock, Monroe lost his job in 1979 when the company he was working for closed.

"It just creates a lot of anger and hurt," he said. "We kind of feel that we made Whitlock what it is today, only to turn around and find that they are turning us out."

If the transition is difficult for employees, it is equally hard for Demmings, present during employee meetings and responsible for initiating an out-placement program designed to help workers prepare for job-hunting.

"Of course it's difficult," Demmings said. "It's a difficult personal and professional issue. We are first obliged to offer some protection for (the employees') future. When you go through a personal trauma of losing a job, you may find yourself jumping into the first thing you see and find you've made a mistake. We want to help them through that."

DEMMINGS SAID productivity has remained high despite the impending October closing. Sales are booming and customers remain satisfied with the product.

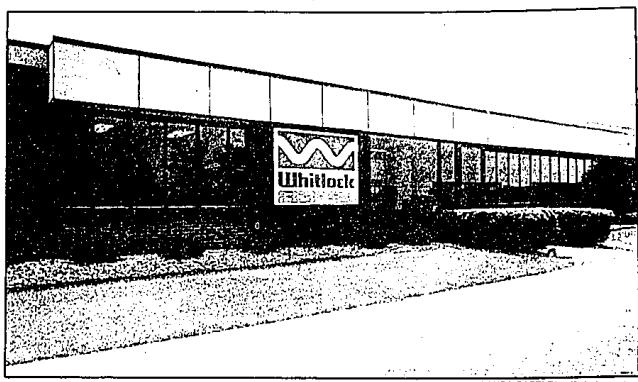
Whitlock even led the corporation in first-quarter sales this year, he said.

"We are genuinely pleased with the kind of commitment we've seen from the employees," Demmings said. "Quality has been good, our people's efforts have been good. Given the challenge, they have done well."

Monroe said the union met with general management and asked what could be done to keep the plant operating. They were met with an ominous reply: "Concessions are not the problem."

Demmings said the company has no intention of consolidating AEC's three other plants. But he added that the company "cannot offer any promises."

"We can't promise anything, just as GM or any other company can't



LAURA CASTLE/staff photographer

Whitlock Inc. is at 23231 N. Industrial Park Drive, Farmington Hills.

promise that they won't protect the interests of the company. But we have done everything possible, in this case, to eliminate the surprise and the questions surrounding this

move.

THE EARLY notice did little to allay the fears of employees, some of whom have been around for 20 of the 30 years that Whitlock has been

in operation.

"You just can't cry over spilled milk, though," Monroe said. "I think we've shown our anger by now. We just have to go on."

Volunteers for Rouge Rescue '87 may register early to avoid waiting in line Saturday. Fill out the registration form and either drop it off or mail it to the Public Services Department by 4:30 p.m. Friday. The cleanup will be east of Tuck, a half mile north of Eight Mile, from 8:30 a.m. to noon Saturday. Afterward, a picnic barbecue of hamburgers and hot dogs will be served to all participants.

Registration Form:

Don't wait in line. REGISTER NOW.

ROUGE RESCUE '87 REGISTRATION FORM

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone No. _____

Organization (if applicable) _____

Signature _____

Mail to: Public Services Dept., City of Farmington Hills, 23231 N. Industrial Park Drive, Farmington Hills, MI 48334

Drop off registration form at the Public Services Office at City Hall, June 1, 1987.

WE NEED YOUR HELP! SIGN UP NOW!

Rouge River cleanup needs volunteers

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idents are asked to call Dale Countegnan, assistant to the public services director, at 473-9520 to let him know how many volunteers are expected. Residents also may fill out and mail the attached coupon.

Farmington residents are asked to call Earl Billing, public services department director, at 473-7250. Registration for both Farmington Hills and Farmington volunteers will take place at each city's cleanup site.

The Hills cleanup site is east of Tuck, a half mile north of Eight

Mile, south of Timberidge Apartments.

The Farmington site is along the river in Shawwassee Park, Power and Shawwassee.

WITH THE help of city employees, volunteers will be asked to help remove about five logjams and debris in the river near the apartment complex at the Farmington Hills site.

Volunteers will be asked to work along the banks of the river. City employees will be doing much of the harder work with chainsaws and dump trucks, Countegnan said.

The portion of the Rouge that crosses Farmington and Farming-

ton Hills doesn't suffer industrial pollution as it does down river. But logjams and other debris cause the river to change course.

Farmington's effort will be a general cleanup because the city's Department of Public Works crews continually maintain the park's portion of the Rouge, said City Manager Robert Deadman.

In Farmington Hills, volunteers will be treated to a lunch following the cleanup. Participants also will receive T-shirts bearing the Rouge Rescue '87 logo, Countegnan said.

Farmington and Farmington Hills are only two of 20 communities in Wayne and Oakland counties

that will participate in the annual cleanup, triggered by the Friends of the Rouge citizens organization.

FARMINGTON HILLS City Council showed its support for the cleanup by adopting a resolution committing the city to a local cleanup project.

The regional cleanup will target the river from Walled Lake and Birmingham through Northville and the southern portions in western Detroit.

Friends of the Rouge recently received an \$80,000 donation from Ford Motor Division. Other Rouge cleanup sponsors are Ford Motor Co. and WJBK-Channel TV2.

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