

Collaboration Means Success For Perryville and Perry County

Perry County is known as a community with a strong work ethic. It is engrained in the German heritage and is evident within the collaborative relationships found between City, County, private entities and businesses. This was demonstrated in December 2016 when the Perryville Fire Department responded to the Atlas EPS property to combat the largest recorded fire in the department's history. The fire consumed and destroyed a total of six buildings before being extinguished by multiple fire departments nearly 21 hours later.

Atlas EPS specializes in the development and manufacture of innovative, high performance expanded polystyrene (EPS) insulation for construction, packaging and OEM products, many of which are highly flammable.

By Feb. 1, 2017, the Atlas EPS management teams gathered on site to continue centering on the rebuilding process. Atlas EPS General Manager Robert Butkus and Plant Manager Bill Calla expressed eagerness for the reconstruction to continue.

"The process actually started the day after the fire," Butkus said. "We refurbished the building that was left standing and that was the beginning of the whole process."

The company announced in January 2017 the intention to rebuild in Perryville. The local work ethic, skill level of the workforce and other important factors led to this decision to rebuild on the same site.

Plans and blueprints have been finalized for the new buildings. The new facility will include a total operations



and equipment upgrade in an effort to become more efficient. Each employee has played an important role in the selection of the new equipment, and has participated in the design and placement of those implements.

"We know our business, and we know our business well," Butkus said. "Now we can design our facility around a business, and there is not a lot of people who are able to do that."

Though the fire destroyed all but one building, the plant has remained in production during the entire rebuilding process and is currently working at around 10 percent of normal operations. The company has been fortunate enough to be able to fill orders and shipments from sister locations across the country and has reported no loss in sales or order quantities.

"We have kept all of our customers," Calla said. "We are servicing them out of our small working portion or by shipping items directly from one of our sister locations."

"We were fortunate to be able to offer our employees a position at our other locations during this downtime," Butkus said. "They are all back and working in some way at the Perryville location now."

Butkus said that he was impressed

at the response from the community and businesses following the disaster. The first day after the fire, several businesses offered space for office and business operations. Robinson Construction immediately designated an area at their facility to function as a base for the Atlas EPS group to plan and deal with the aftermath.

"Some of our biggest hurdles during this time have been taking care of our customers, taking care of our people and keeping our lines of communication open," Calla said. "All of which we have been able to do, mostly in thanks to the response of the community."

Butkus said they have had about 20 different businesses from the Perryville area pitch in helping with the design phase the new facility. He also shared that multiple local manufacturers offered positions for Atlas EPS employees at their locations to ensure continued paychecks until operations could resume.

"The community outreach has been overwhelming," stated Bill Calla, plant manager.

Everyone on the Atlas EPS team would like to extend their deepest gratitude towards the Perryville community, from the many fire departments, who responded, to the competitors, vendors, customers and local businesses that have provided support. If there is a silver lining, it is that, most importantly, no one was harmed in the event, and from the ashes will arise what promises to be an extremely efficient EPS facility in the U.S. 🌱

Scott Sattler is the executive director of the Perryville/Perry County Economic Development Authority Office. Learn more at www.perrycountyeda.com.