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Conduit maker Republic honored as success story

City, state officials tour new Louisville facility

By **Robert Schoenberger**
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The Courier-Journal

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Several months into production, steel-tube maker Republic Conduit is more than halfway to its goal of hiring 270 people within the next two years.



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Reflections of some Republic Conduit employees appeared in a mirror yesterday at the new plant. Workers at the plant earn an average \$16 per hour making steel conduit to house electrical wiring, mainly in industrial and commercial buildings. (Photos by Keith Williams, The Courier-Journal)

"We're at one-and-a-half shifts right now. We'll be up to three by the end of the year," said Dennis Scanga, human resources manager at the plant in the Jefferson Riverport International industrial park.

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Workers at the plant earn an average \$16 per hour making steel conduits used to house electrical wiring, mainly in industrial and commercial buildings.

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City and state officials toured the new facility yesterday.

Bruce Traugher, Metro Community Development Cabinet secretary, said, "The great thing about new facilities like this is that

every one of the 140 people here either thinks this is a better job than the one they had, or they didn't have a job."

Republic announced it would build in Louisville in late 2004. After the state promised \$7.5 million in tax breaks, the company said it would close tube plants in Georgia and Michigan and consolidate that work at the new facility in Louisville. Of the 160 people who lost jobs when those plants closed, about 30 have moved to Louisville.

Scott Harris, vice president and general manager of the conduit company, said the Louisville plant is much more efficient than the two facilities that closed.

"With a new layout and new equipment, you get new levels of automation that you just can't get at an older plant," Harris said.

In addition to moving the tube production lines to Louisville, Republic added a galvanizing line, work that it had outsourced.

The galvanizing line, in which 20-foot lengths of steel tubes are dipped in molten zinc for coating, started production a week ago. Employees have not yet run full shifts on some of the finishing equipment on that line, Harris said.

The plant's two galvanizing lines, the hot-dip operation and a separate one where tubes are electro-plated with zinc, were difficult to bring to Louisville because of environmental concerns, Harris said.

During a tour of the lines yesterday, he said Republic had to redesign the electro-plating area to enclose many of the chemical



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James Johnson bundled conduit at the Republic Conduit plant in the Jefferson Riverport International industrial park. The plant is more than halfway to its goal of hiring 270 people within the next two years.

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vats where steel tubes are cleaned before plating.

"That's where Senator McConnell's office was a real help," Harris said referring U.S. Sen. Mitch McConnell, R-Ky.

Larry Cox, a representative of McConnell's office attending the tour, said the senator was able to prod the Environmental Protection Agency to consider Republic's applications, but he said local officials were more involved in helping the company come to Louisville.

Harris said the enclosures for the electro-plating line were designed with help from the Metro Air Pollution Control District.

Metro Mayor Jerry Abramson praised Republic for coming to Louisville, saying it was a big part of Riverport's success.

"In January 2003, there was 2.5 million square feet of available space in Riverport. Today, there's less than half a million square feet" available, Abramson said. Republic's plant has 440,000 square feet.


Riverport President Larry McFall said the industrial park is building facilities to try to attract more businesses as much of the remaining space is split into small portions within existing buildings.

Reporter Robert Schoenberger can be reached at (502) 582-4669.

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