

INSIDE:

Page 2:
Aynor Election Results

Page 5:
Proposed 50 Jobs for
Myrtle Beach Area

Page 6:
Obits and Birth
Announcements

Page 7:
Business Spotlights

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The Long Term Vision Beneteau USA Invests in the Future

By Tiffany S. Martinez

This November Beneteau USA, located in Marion, is shutting down most of their production to reconfigure their 250,000 square foot facility into one of the most revolutionary and modern big sailboat factories in America. Investing millions into a new lean manufacturing system that will save the company time, work and money. Lead by the Vice President of Manufacturing, Gerard Martineau, the factory will change from a previous system of eight independent production lines into a new, single line, continuous flow production facility comprising twenty operation positions. The outcome of this new way of building will allow shortened lead times, less work in process and greater flexibility in model mix. Marion's plant will be able to build anything from 30 footers to 50 footers all within the same line. It will be the only American sailboat plant to be able to do this. "We have been the premier sailboat builder in America since we located to Marion in the mid 80's and one of the most advanced in North America, but after the reconfiguration we will definitely be the most advanced," stated Wayne Burdick, President of Beneteau

USA. "When the plant reconfiguration work is complete and we are able to turn on the new, lean, mean, production machine, no one else in the US will be able to make cruising sailboats with as much efficiency and flexibility of product mix," he added.

Beneteau USA just in the last year made over a million dollar investment into a CNC machinery driven woodshop. This will allow previously outsourced jobs to be done within the plant. We are now able to cut our own wood, the flats of the wood are cut here, they are no longer being outsourced or imported. This means more work for Marion, SC," said Burdick. "This is our home and we are not going anywhere, we will be here in the long term. Our parent company, Beneteau Group in France, believes in the American market, believes that Beneteau USA will be here in the years to come and that is why they have made this huge investment," he reiterates.

Beneteau USA not only have invested in their plant here in Marion, but their employees have invested their time to the Marion Intermediate School's

"Lunch Program." Twenty-one volunteers eat lunch once a month with children from the schools. They sit and talk to them about what they do at Beneteau. They speak with them about what it is like to be part of a team and other values that the school system is trying to instill. "This is more than a mentor program, our people are role models to these children," said Jennifer Reinman, Beneteau USA's Human Resources Director.

Beneteau USA has been a leader in boat building, but they also lead the way in customer service. They were just announced as the winners of the National Marine Manufacturers Association (NMMA) CSI Award. This award marks the third consecutive year that they have secured this honor. This award program credits participating manufacturers that actively measure customer satisfaction and pursue continuous improvement to better serve the customer. "We are so proud to learn that Beneteau USA is the only sailboat manufacturer in the world to receive the NMMA 2009 Marine Industry CSI Award," said Burdick.



Beneteau has many exciting changes happening that should make them more competitive in the sailboat market. This means more jobs consistently for the Marion area. "With our long term vision there will always be people who want to go on the ocean, we will be the one who provides them with their Floating Dreams," concludes Burdick.

Top Picture: Beneteau USA's new CNC Machinery Driven Woodshop. Bottom Inset Picture: The Beneteau 37, one of the models of "Floating Dreams" that they produce at the Marion Plant.