

TPI

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manufacturing operations in Newton, the company said part of the reason was due to the uncertainty of when wind-related tax credits would go into effect, as well as uncertainties with the regulatory environment, costs and supply chains.

The Inflation Reduction Act was signed into law by President Joe Biden earlier this year, going into effect in August. The law was established to reduce the deficit, lower prescription drug prices and invest in domestic energy production while also promoting sustainable energy, such as wind.

With the support the new law gives to the domestic renewable energy sector, Siwek said TPI looks forward “to working with GE to take advantage of this opportunity to relaunch the Iowa facility.” He went on in his statement to thank General Electric “for their confidence in TPI’s team to implement this strategy.”

Vic Abate, General Electric Renewable Energy’s CEO of Onshore Wind, said his employer “is proud to continue our relationship with TPI in Iowa.” The wind-blade manufacturing plant, he added, has a strong history manufacturing blades for General Electric’s onshore wind turbines.

“...And they have played a key role in helping us to deliver and install our installed base across North America,” Abate said. “We look forward to working together with

them in Iowa to create jobs and manufacture equipment that produces clean, reliable, sustainable energy for our customers.”

TPI manufactured wind blades for General Electric in Iowa from 2008 to 2021.

At the moment, TPI does not know how many jobs would be created from reopening the Newton plant, nor does the company know the volume of wind blades it would be making. Josh Syhlman, vice president of global services, told Newton News the plant is still equipped with the tooling the produce blades.

Syhlman and TPI are eager to begin production in Iowa once again.

“TPI is excited to continue being a part of Newton,” he said. “I think that’s the biggest thing for me.”

Mayor Mike Hansen said in a statement to the newspaper that the city looks forward to welcoming TPI and their employees back to Newton. Last year the mayor was confident the resiliency of the city and its “diversified economy” would pull through despite the initial closure.

“The company has been a great community partner since they came to Newton and we anticipated they would work hard to keep their plant and jobs in Iowa,” Hansen said. “This announcement is a positive step forward and we are excited to see production begin at their facility here in Newton in 2024.”

When TPI officially suspended its operations, more than 700 employees were without a job. Before the New-

ton plant closed its doors, the company collaborated with IowaWORKS to hold a career fair for the displaced workers. About 130 employers across Iowa participated in the fair.

Although the career fair was open to all job seekers, it was initially created to aid TPI employees. Wind blades have not been made in the Newton plant since the beginning of the year, but TPI maintained its lease of the factory through 2022 and was actively exploring other opportunities for the facility.

TPI was the largest employer in Jasper County at the time of its closing. The company began producing wind blades one year after Maytag was purchased by the Whirlpool Corporation and ceased its longtime Newton operations. It was a huge blow to Newton’s economy. TPI partly filled in that loss of industry.

Frank Liebl, executive director of Newton Development Corporation, told Newton News that about a third of TPI’s workforce at the time of the closing were Jasper County residents. He estimated another third was from Marshall County and another third from Polk County.

The unemployment rate in Jasper County was at about 3.6 or 3.7 percent in December 2021 when the TPI plant closed. By the next month, it climbed to about 5 percent. Since then, Liebl said “things have leveled off again.” The current unemployment rate in Jasper County is about 2.5 percent.

“We didn’t see near the uptick in unemployment that we thought we would see,” Liebl said, adding that the loss

was distributed among other counties. “...A lot of these other companies in the area picked up some TPI employees, so they were able to get on and find jobs shortly after TPI shut down, too.”

Liebl is unsure why it’s going to take TPI so long to ramp up, but he imagines there are lot of details that need to be worked out. He doesn’t know for sure. Regardless, he sees positive impact for Newton going forward. It will take some time, but he foresees TPI returning as the largest employer in the county.

“I really think with this contract and its 10-year window that we’ll see them, again, being the leading employer in Jasper County.”

In the same industrial district as TPI is the neighboring Arcosa, which constructs wind towers at its Newton plant. Arcosa, too, experienced its own set of layoffs around the same time as TPI. Liebl said that company is now in the process of hiring a few more people as production continues to ramp up.

“I’m sure the Inflation Reduction Act had some incentives for them also because it seems like anybody that had something to do with renewables was going to get a benefit from that act,” Liebl said, noting Arcosa has contracts to make towers for a number of wind energy suppliers.

Read General Electric Renewable Energy CEO of Onshore Wind Vic Abate’s full statement here:

“GE is proud to continue our partnership with TPI in Iowa. TPI has a strong history manufacturing blades for GE’s

onshore wind turbines, and they have played a key role in helping us to deliver and install our installed base across North America. We look forward to working together with them in Iowa to create jobs and manufacture equipment that produces clean, reliable, sustainable energy for our customers.”

Read TPI Composites, Inc. President and CEO Bill Siwek’s full statement here:

“We are pleased to announce our unique partnering approach with GE to secure the long-term availability of our Newton, Iowa facility for GE’s future blade production needs. This agreement is possible in part due to the support provided by the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 for critical American industries serving the domestic renewable energy sector. We look forward to working with GE to take advantage of this opportunity to relaunch the Iowa facility and thank GE for their confidence in TPI’s team to implement this strategy.”

Read Newton Mayor Mike Hansen’s full statement here:

“The City of Newton looks forward to welcoming TPI and their employees back to Newton. The company has been a great community partner since they came to Newton and we anticipated they would work hard to keep their plant and jobs in Iowa. This announcement is a positive step forward and we are excited to see production begin at their facility here in Newton in 2024.”

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Christopher Braunschweig/Newton News

Newton Superintendent Tom Messinger gives an enrollment update during a past school board meeting.

Enrollment

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Legislature passing a law lifted the deadline on open enrollment. Messinger even told school board members in late September the district was seeing more open enrollments.

It became a “big burden” on the school district. In addition to the struggles with planning, keeping track of the open enroll ins and outs has been a challenge.

To answer Padgett’s question, Messinger said the data brought to the school board were the final numbers submitted to the state. At the time of the Oct. 24

meeting, the superintendent was unsure of any corrections or adjustments that needed to be made. There could be some later on. But for now no changes.

Preschool numbers are increasing in Newton schools, which school board member Josh Cantu was quick to point out. He commended the community partners of Peck Child Development and Newton YMCA, specifically for adopting the school district’s preschool curriculum.

Although the data shows an increase of 13 preschool students, preschoolers are weighted at 50 percent. Meaning Newton actually has 26 more preschoolers.

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