



The Times

As plants move on, one company keeps spinning

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BY BILL MOONEY

TRENTON -- The sign across the Delaware River proclaims: Trenton Makes the World Takes.

Yesterday, dignitaries and businesspeople gathered to celebrate one employer that is working to ensure that message still has meaning.

Hutchinson Industries was honored for calling the state capital its home for the last 25 years. The subsidiary of Paris-based Hutchinson employs approximately 320 people in eight locations, encompassing a total of 300,000 square feet throughout Trenton.

Trenton's heyday as a mecca for manufacturing is over, but for the last quarter century, Hutchinson has found success producing a product in use throughout the world: the wheel.

Hutchinson's specialty is actually reinventing the wheel. The company designs and makes three types: so-called run-flat tires that allow military vehicles to keep moving even after the tires have been shot out; aluminum wheels that are lighter than steel wheels but strong enough to allow vehicles to carry more gear; and beadlock wheels that allow vehicles to more easily negotiate sandy surfaces.

"Our products help to save lives," company President Pascal Seradarian said yesterday. "They are for safety, for protection. We do everything to save the life of a soldier."

Their wheels are finding more and more non-military uses as well. Seradarian said they are in use on monorails, including ones at Newark Airport, in Dallas, London and Malaysia; on construction and other commercial vehicles; and on vehicles with brand names as familiar as Jeep or Winnebago.

"We look for niche marketing," Seradarian said. "It has enabled us to survive." The company has grown from a two-person operation on South Clinton Avenue in the Roebing complex that once was the heart of Trenton's manufacturing district to become a major private employer in the city, including five manufacturing plants at Mulberry, East State, Ewing and Southard streets and three warehouses at other locations.

Trenton was once a center for rubber products manufacturers, and when Hutchinson arrived in Trenton in 1983, there still were about seven rubber companies here, according to Seradarian. Today, there are three, and Seradarian explained that their ability to adapt has fueled their growth.

According to Seradarian, Hutchinson will record about \$160 million in sales this year, including approximately \$33 million in sales at the 50,000-square-foot Ewing and Perry streets site that concentrates on designing and making aluminum wheels.

But officials yesterday wanted to shine a light on Hutchinson for more than just business reasons.

Seradarian, in addition to running Hutchinson, sits on the board of directors of the Rescue Mission of Trenton that assists homeless people with shelter, meals and other services.

"As far as I'm concerned, he is a model of what a corporate citizen should be," said Mary Gay Abbott-Young, chief executive of the Rescue Mission. She said Hutchinson has employed Mission clients, giving them hope as well as a paycheck.

Mayor Douglas Palmer thanked Hutchinson for remaining in Trenton even though the company has had offers to relocate. Hutchinson turned what had been run-down, vacant properties at Mulberry and Ewing streets into productive businesses.

"It's great," said At-Large Councilman Manny Segura, "when we find a company that wants to say yes to Trenton."

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