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City optimistic after closing of Energizer plant

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City optimistic after closing of Energizer plant

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Stefan Pyles Chief Reporter | 0 comments

The recent closing of the Energizer battery production plant in Maryville brought talks of a depleting economy and rising unemployment to the city.

As with most stories, different perspectives focus on different aspects of the same reality.

During the year leading up to the plant's closing, set to finalize at the end of December, Nodaway County Economic Development and the Maryville Career Center assisted employees facing unemployment with job training and support.

Despite the struggles unemployed workers now face, confidence is high that leaders will shortly fill the void created by Energizer's departure.

"Nodaway County Economic Development Team is working day and night to find a company to replace Energizer," City Councilman Glen Jonagan said. "The way they're approaching this is that there's so many square feet available for use. It could be an assembly plant. It could be a company with a need for storage.

Decreased consumer spending is also a consequence of the plant's closing.

"Three hundred laid off would mean another 150 jobs would be potentially lost in retail and services," said Mark Jelavich, retired professor of economics. "Most of the workers lived outside Maryville proper, which dissipates some of the impact. Kawasaki has been hiring some people. There have also been migrations to Kansas City and Omaha in search of good jobs.

"However, Maryville is diversified enough that the Energizer plant closing won't be fatal to the community itself."

A Nov. 8, 2012 news release posted on the NCED's website said, "As a team of community leaders, we will work with the company through the workforce and facility transition. At this time and in the future, our response team's primary focus is on the affected workers, their families and ensuring support and training is provided."

The news release also acknowledges that the roughly 310 employees would receive severance packages upon separation from the company.

Lee Langerock, a certified economic development finance professional, recently resigned as director from the NCED and took a position in Independence. Because of this, the NCED was unavailable for comment at the time of publication.

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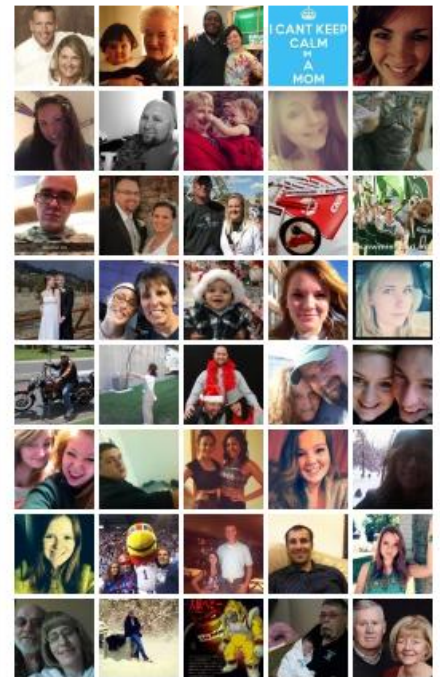
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Some think Energizer's decision indicates a positive shift in the direction of sustainability.

"There's an opportunity to shift the nation's workforce toward green jobs," Scott Cassel, CEO of the Product Stewardship Institute, told NPR on a Nov. 28, 2012 broadcast. "If we can use more rechargeable batteries and less of the single-use batteries, we're actually saving resources.

"This is the price of innovation. This is what we need to look forward to in the world of greater sustainability."

For Energizer, the decision is one the company had to make.

"These actions represent significant and necessary changes to our overall cost structure and organization," Energizer CEO Ward Klein said in a Nov. 8, 2012 press release. "We have performed a thorough review of our current and future business requirements and have identified the changes that will support our long-term strategies to maximize cash flow in household products, enable continued growth in personal care and drive shareholder value."

In the meantime, the city of Maryville will look to fill the vacant space to reduce the empty building's impact on the city.

"There's all kinds of things that could go in there," Jonagan said. "I'm very optimistic that we'll find a replacement in the next year."

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