

Nelson Co. Industries opens doors on new facility Grand opening, reception is Friday

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By Erin L. McCoy

There are no more leaky roofs, no more depressing and dingy work spaces, for the 90 employees of Nelson County Industries starting this week. Monday was their first day at the bigger, brighter and newly renovated Guthrie Opportunity Center, and on Friday the grand opening will officially celebrate the new center.

“Staff and individuals overall are just ecstatic. Words can’t even describe the improvement that we’ve made,” said NCI supervisor Shannon Oller.

NCI was founded in 1974 with the mission of providing employment for developmentally disabled adults. It started out in the St. Monica Church gym on Third Street in Bardstown and has had two more homes since then.

Most recently it was housed on Allison Avenue, in the old Bardstown sewing factory — a building that “was absolutely falling apart,” according to Kristy McGrew, assistant to the CEO of Communicare Inc., the nonprofit organization that operates NCI along with a number of other programs in the Lincoln Trail District.

Oller agreed that the old location was in very poor condition.

“The roof was beyond repair. We had canopies hanging to catch the water when it came through the roof,” she said.

The new facility inhabits the former Intertec building on Nutter Drive and more than doubles the available square footage from 35,000 to 80,000. The space should be a huge boost to productivity. Oller said trailers of recycled goods can pull directly into the back of the facility, which has six loading docks — four more than before — and the better lighting and higher ceilings allow them to double-stack raw materials they receive for their contract work.

This adds up to making the facility so much more efficient that employees ran out of work Monday, McGrew said.

This means that not only should NCI be able to take on more contract work — which includes labeling and packaging for local distilleries and work for Trim Masters Inc. — but it can boost its recycling capacity as well.

“With our recycling program, that we work with the county and city with, I can definitely see that expanding in the near future,” Oller said.

For the first time, the area will also include spaces for psychiatric and art therapy, as well as other services provided for employees who previously required transportation to separate locations.

One more advantage may be the creation of additional jobs for local adults with developmental disabilities, though Oller said it’s still too early to say whether this will happen. Still, employment at the facility has doubled every time it has moved to a new location in the past

One thing is certain: “We’ve never done anything like this project, and the reason this came about was the Guthrie family approached us with this idea,” McGrew said.

Pat Guthrie, a native of Nelson County, along with about 15 other family members organized the Guthrie Matching Fund, in which they would match any community contributions to the project up to half a million dollars. The community, at the encouragement of supporters such as Bardstown mayor Dick Heaton and Communicare CEO Dan Simpson, met and exceeded the Guthrie family’s expectations, and NCI has raised \$1.7 million for the project to date.

For Pat Guthrie, his family’s contribution was only a natural extension of what his aunt, Nancy Guthrie McKay, started years ago when she helped found NCI.

“My aunt actually was the one who was the driving force behind getting this whole project set up way back when,” Guthrie said. Guthrie McKay was inspired by her son, Adam McKay, who has Down syndrome.

“I guess the ultimate credit goes to him,” Pat Guthrie said.

“Through Adam we got to know other Down syndrome kids around town,” Pat Guthrie remembered. “It’s a group of kids that’s very special to me and to my family.”

Adam McKay started working at NCI in its first year, and still works there today.

“It has provided a very full and meaningful life for him and many others,” Guthrie said. “Back when this program was started they had no provision for a meaningful life.”

McGrew agrees that NCI has provided many developmentally disabled people with the opportunity to live independently. The new facility only makes the job more real for them, she said.

“We’re glad to give them a sense of self worth that others of us take for granted,” McGrew said.

“They’re adjusting very, very well,” Oller said. “I think it’s going to provide a better quality of life and a more meaningful day here at this facility.”

So when Pat Guthrie found out the future of NCI was being compromised by the quality of its facility, he took action.

“At this time that there was this huge need, I got in contact with my uncles and cousins and everyone and tried to rally the troops.” The result, clearly, was a huge success.

Many of those relatives plan to be present at the ceremony Friday.

“We’ve decided to make a family reunion out of this occasion,” Guthrie said.

Friday’s event will feature a reception 1-2 p.m. and a grand opening ceremony 2-2:30 p.m. Business owners who have worked with NCI, family members and friends of employees, along with anyone interested in the NCI program are invited to attend.