





Business of the year: Nor-Am heats up Le Mars with plans for Harker's plant

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By Magdalene Landegent

Le Mars' business of the year will be expanding into the former Harker's plant.

Nor-Am Cold Storage announced its decision to purchase the recently-closed meat packaging plant Saturday while receiving the Chamber of Commerce's Business of the Year award.

"We put in an offer right before the end of the year," Greg Brandt, Nor-Am president and CEO told the crowd after the planned purchase was announced. "We will continue to grow our meat-repackaging and we need more room. We have to cross a few t's and dot a few i's, but hopefully we'll be in before 30 days."

Nor-Am will retain two former Harker's employees, Harold Peters and Sharon Freking, to help run the new location, and Brandt said they will likely add staff.

Currently Nor-Am employs more than 150 people in four states: Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska and Texas.



During the award presentation at the Saturday night Le Mars Chamber of Commerce dinner, Brandt said they hope to invite other companies to share the Harker's facility.

"There's office space there we'd like to see used by companies in the community," he said.

He mentioned the possibility of using the space as a place for small food companies to get on their feet.

Nor-Am's history dates back to 1999 when it was opened in Le Mars as a cold storage facility.

In 2005, the owners purchased an available building in Le Mars and opened a USDA certified meat packaging, trimming and boning plant.



Officials from Le Mars' 2008 Business of the Year -- Nor-Am Cold Storage -- announced Saturday night their intention to purchase the former Harker's plant in Le Mars and expand Nor-Am's meat repackaging business. Pictured here are Dan Casey, general manager for the 21st Street plant in Le Mars, and Janna and Greg Brandt, president and CEO of Nor-Am with the Business of the Year award. Nor-Am offers cold storage, blast freezing, custom packing and more in four states.

That move marked their expansion into product repackaging food and food-related products, serving customers around the country and the globe.

"Primarily we do pork, beef and poultry," Brandt said.

Dan Casey, general manager of the Le Mars Nor-Am plant on 21st Street, estimated that exports make up about 15 percent of Nor-Am's orders.

"It continues to increase. We're shipping to places we never shipped to before," Casey said. "It's been a record year for pork exports."

Recently, Nor-Am sent 1.2 million pounds of ham to Russia.

And before the Olympics, they worked with other cold storage companies to ship food -- 120 truckloads weekly for two months -- to China to prepare for the crowds.

"We send a lot to Mexico, Korea, China and Russia," Casey said.

Along with the planned purchase of the Harker's plant, Nor-Am is also expanding on another front.

"We just brought a facility in Detroit Lake, Minn. the last week in December," Brandt said.

The new Minnesota facility will add 65,000 square feet of cold storage.

In a time when many industries are looking at cuts, Nor-Am was poised to grow.

"Our customers are strong, business is going good, and interest rates and prices are good," Brandt said.

Brandt grew up in Galva and now lives in Merville with his wife, Janna.

Casey joined the company about a year ago.

"Greg (Brandt) hired me to help grow the plant here so he could concentrate on other projects," he said.

Casey and his wife Katie live in Le Mars.

One of Nor-Am's strengths, he said, is that it's a family company -- with four plants and a packing plant.

"We take care of our customers and the folks at our plants," Casey said.

Brandt is the brains behind the operation, according to Casey.

"He has great instinct in doing business, doing the right thing at the right time," Casey said.

Brandt attributes Nor-Am's success to the employees and customers.

"A lot of that is the result of the people, a lot of hard work by people at Nor-Am Cold Storage," he said.

Nor-Am will celebrate a decade of business in March.

"Where [Brandt has] taken the company in 10 years is incredible," Casey said. "I'm really looking forward to this year, to getting into the Harker's building and moving with our packaging company."

"We're very happy to be here in Le Mars," Brandt said.