



MEXICO, MO. -- The A.P. Green Brick Refractory in Mexico, Mo., has come full circle.

Originally a face brick manufacturing plant, it was converted to an industrial fire brick plant a century ago.

"That event was a turning point for our fine city," Mexico Investor Dan Erdel said. "And today, we are unveiling a new turning point."

It's still six months away from production, but the mid-America Brick Factory in Mexico, Mo. can already draw a crowd.

Sen. Kit Bond came home to Mexico to help unveil a new business in a plant his grandfather first developed there a century ago.

At its zenith, the Green Refractory employed thousands, making brick for such uses as the boiler furnaces in warships.

"This facility has been virtually idle for more than ten years, but is now alive and, we hope, flourishing for a long time to come," Mexico Mayor Ron Loesch said.

The Green Refractory is being reborn as Mid-America Brick, which will return the plant to face brick production. It will use all that Missouri clay that was cast aside during the fire brick years.

"We're using the clays we had to dig through to get to the refractory clay," Mid-America Brick Vice President David Adams said. "So we have that clay here."

The new business will employ as many as 80 people, some of whom are on their second time around.

"It's so good to see a piece of history being restored back into operation," MAB employee Ron Bridgeman, who worked at the plant in the 1970's, said.

Armed with state and federal grants and tax credits, another former A.P. Green brick maker has returned to raise the refractory from the ashes.

"We are building. We are creating jobs," Mid-America Brick President Frank Cordie said. "And we are part of an economic recovery."

The community's emotional attachment to the historic plant gives Cordie a level of local support most entrepreneurs would envy.

"There's a saying that says you can't stop a man who knows he's right and keeps a-comin'," Rep. Steve Hobbs (R) Mexico said.

Roughly half the \$22 million needed to renovate the plant has come from government grants, loan guarantees, and tax credits.

Frank Cordie said the plant should be in production by the beginning of 2011 and, eventually, should be able to produce in excess of sixty million bricks a year.