

Mid-America Brick opening in March

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Mid-America Brick has more than 30 employees and expects to employ about 80 after full production begins

MEXICO, Mo. - Frank Cordie had a dream. The Mexico native wanted to put some life back into an icon of this city's proud past, the historic A.P. Green Brick Refractory, which had been shuttered since 2002.

The problem was, he didn't know how to achieve that dream.

"We hit many hurdles, fell down many times, tripped and ran into road blockages that came in the way," Cordie said. "But we got over them and said 'OK, what do we do now?' We faced this problem, and we got over it. Obviously, we got over all of them to get to this point, and we're kind of at the starting line."

Cordie and public officials announced in June that the A.P. Green plant, which opened in 1910, would be reborn as Mid-America Brick, a face-brick production plant for residential and commercial building construction.

In an ironic touch of *déjà vu*, the plant is returning to its roots. At its zenith, Green employed thousands and made industrial fire brick for uses such as the boiler furnaces in warships. However, the company's facility began as a face-brick production plant a century ago.

The plant is scheduled to begin production in March with more than 30 employees, and Cordie, the CEO, said Mid-America Brick expects to have about 80 employees and eventually produce more than 60 million bricks a year.

“It’s going to be just one fantastic company,” Cordie said. “We’re going to make a lot of brick, we’re going to sell a lot of brick, and we’re going to have a lot of fun doing it.”

With the infrastructure in place and a strong demand for the product — Missouri has no other brick making plants — Cordie knew the potential was there to make the dream come true. The financial resources, however, were another matter.

An incentive package from the state of Missouri helped to bring Cordie’s dream closer to reality. MAB was awarded \$1.3 million in Brownfield Redevelopment program tax credits, \$613,350 in Enhanced Enterprise Zone program tax credits and \$600,000 in Community Development Block Grant Industrial Infrastructure grant funds. The state’s incentive package also included \$275,000 in New Jobs Training Program funding and \$132,000 in Employee Recruitment and Referral savings. All told, approximately half the \$22 million needed to renovate the plant has come from government grants, loan guarantees and tax credits.

“For nearly a century, hardworking Missourians took pride in manufacturing a quality product here in Mexico,” Gov. Jay Nixon said. “It is only fitting that a new brick company will continue the tradition with another generation of workers, creating 74 new jobs in this area.”

The project also received \$9.75 million in private sector funding from St. Louis-based Advantage Capital Partners. Other funding sources included Rand Capital, Environmental Liability Transfer and a group of individual investors, many of whom live in Mexico, according to a company news release.

“I didn’t have any idea how this was going to come together,” Cordie said. “No one could ever picture what came about would actually happen in the manner that it did. Like the guys at Advantage said, it’s one of the most complex deals in the United States — all the different facets, all the ways that the funding came together to make this happen.”

Many of the employees, including Cordie, are on their second time around at the facility.

“This is a very important step in the process in the redevelopment of Mexico, Mo.,” Cordie said. “While we will not be an A.P. Green with the ... thousands of jobs that they had, we’re a small step in the right direction. We are building, creating jobs and are part of an economic recovery.”

The new facility’s unveiling celebration on June 25 attracted hundreds, including Kit Bond, who came home to Mexico six months before his retirement from the US Senate to help announce a new business in a plant his grandfather first developed there a century ago.

“We’re real proud of it,” Cordie said after the wraps were pulled off the new sign. “When you come into our city, and you drive by this facility, and it’s idle,” he continued, before stopping to collect his thoughts. “It’s iconic. It’s truly an iconic facility that we have here. To put some life back into it, to get some action going here it is way more emotional for the community than anyone would have ever thought.”

Cordie said along with all the hard work that went into making this dream a reality, perseverance was key. “We finally made it to the starting line,” he said. “So now the company can begin.”

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