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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Companies to add 500 jobs

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KALAMAZOO -- An aluminum fabricator and a longtime maker of food packaging products will spend more than \$120 million and add up to 500 jobs in the Kalamazoo area during the next few years, economic development officials announced Tuesday.

Separately, AT&T says it will make a major job-expansion announcement on Thursday at its Kalamazoo operation at Lovell and Rose streets. The telecommunications company has not said how many new jobs it will announce, but a source indicated that more than 100 jobs are to be added.

Kaiser Aluminum, a \$1.3 billion, California-based producer of fabricated aluminum products for the aerospace industry and others, is expected to bring 300 jobs and invest \$80 million in the community. It plans to locate an aluminum-extrusion operation at the Midlink Business Park on Sprinkle Road and I-94 in Comstock Township, taking up about 435,000 square feet of space, officials said.

Fabri-Kal Corp., of Kalamazoo, a longtime maker of food packaging products, also expects to add 160 to 200 new jobs here as it expands during the next five to seven years. It plans to sell its 3303 E. Cork St. facility and relocate into the 387,360-square-foot former Mead Paper Co. facility at 4141 Manchester Road.

The Kaiser Aluminum operation will use about half the available space in the Midlink East building, one of two structures that was redeveloped from the former General Motors Corp. metal stamping plant located at the site. The car parts plant closed in the mid-1990s.

The two Midlink buildings total about 1.6 million square feet of space. Once Kaiser moves in, the majority of space in both buildings will be used, a Midlink spokeswoman said.

Kaiser received a \$3.7 million tax credit Tuesday from the Michigan Economic Growth Authority to facilitate the development.

Ron Kitchens, chief executive officer of Southwest Michigan First, said Kaiser expects to be operating before the end of this year. He said the tax credit will be spread over 10 years. The company also has received a pledge of \$280,000 in employee recruitment and job-training assistance from Michigan Works! and a \$100,000 economic development job-training grant from Comstock and Kalamazoo County.

According to Southwest Michigan First, Fabri-Kal plans to invest more than \$3.8 million to upgrade the former Mead paper company site, which has been vacant since 2001. That is part of an overall \$41 million expansion, according to the company.

In a press release, the 58-year-old privately held company said it plans to redevelop the former Mead facility into a state-of-the-art design and manufacturing facility. The company plans to relocate its Technical Center, warehouse space and other operations from its current 3303 E. Cork St. location.

Fabri-Kal makes plastic and corn-based food packaging products like disposable, single-serving juice cups, yogurt containers and drink cups. It has about 115 employees in Kalamazoo, about 300 at a facility in Greenville, S.C., and about 400 at a facility in Hazelton, Pa.

“The facility's location in Kalamazoo gives Fabri-Kal a Midwest manufacturing presence and enables us to take advantage of the manufacturing and tooling expertise that exists in the state,” company President Mike Roeder said in a press release Tuesday. “In addition, it affords the opportunity to strategically align our operations near our current customers.”

Fabri-Kal was approved Tuesday for a \$3.5 million state tax credit over the next five to seven years as well as local incentives through the city of Kalamazoo's Brownfield Redevelopment Authority.