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**Kaiser Kalamazoo boon**

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California-based Kaiser Aluminum plans to officially open at the Midlink Business Park by the middle of the year. When fully operational, the plant will employ about 200 people.

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**KALAMAZOO** — The Kaiser Aluminum plan to move and invest \$100 million into the former General Motors plant in the Midlink Business Park in Kalamazoo and create hundreds of new jobs is putting smiles on the faces of economic developers.

David Smith, president of Midlink Business Park, said Kaiser Aluminum is the perfect tenant for the facility and the company's expansion will be a major boon for the area.

“In this day and age and with these economic conditions, for the company to come to a community like Kalamazoo and invest the money they've invested is nothing short of remarkable,” Smith told MiBiz. “Long term, this

is going to be phenomenal for the community and create the jobs for tomorrow that we want.”

Smith said Kaiser Aluminum will anchor the Midlink Business Park off I-94 on East Cork Street and bring long-term stability to the area. He expects the newly renovated facility to attract more industrial and retail development, such as the recent Candlewood Suites, which opened in late 2009.

A ribbon-cutting for the plant and the beginning of production will take place mid-year 2010, according to Kaiser Aluminum Spokesperson Dave Quast. He said Kaiser Aluminum will hire about 50 Kalamazoo employees by the end of March 2010 and approximately 150 more once the facility is fully operational.

Production associates, engineers and other professional staff will be hired.

The California-based company is a manufacturer of semi-fabricated specialty aluminum products for the aerospace, defense, automotive and general industrial applications. The company announced plans in 2008 to expand to Kalamazoo with its first Midwest plant.

Quast said the Kalamazoo facility will be a world-class, state-of-the-art extrusion plant.

“The production process will be a highly automated and complex operation, requiring employees to train for and learn a variety of complex technical and procedural requirements,” Quast said.

The primary purpose of the Kalamazoo facility will be to produce extruded rod and bar for industrial and general engineering applications.

Kalamazoo will be the company’s primary site for manufacturing Kaiser Select rod and bar product, which is primarily sold through service centers for use in a variety of industrial applications.

Although automotive extrusions for highly engineered applications such as anti-lock braking systems, bumper beams and drive shafts, represent less than 10 percent of Kaiser Aluminum’s consolidated value-added revenues, Quast said the company expects to use the Kalamazoo facility to support growth of automotive extruded products. Corporate average

fuel economy (CAFE) standards and the move to light-weight vehicles will provide more opportunities.

Quast said the Kalamazoo facility will be equipped with state-of-the-art tooling for remelting scrap, casting billet and extruding Kaiser Select aluminum and bar products, which are sought after by customers because of enhanced characteristics such as machining performance.

The site was selected for the expansion because Kalamazoo is at the center of the customer base for the served market of general industrial applications. Quast said the facility location was also selected because of “excellent labor resources in the West Michigan region.”

Kaiser’s Midwest customer base includes automotive suppliers, machinery equipment manufacturers, electrical and other industries requiring light weights, machinability and good electrical conductivity.

Kaiser Aluminum has invested more than \$250 million in organic growth initiatives, including the Kalamazoo expansion, for increased capacity, quality and manufacturing cost improvements. Quast said the company is well-positioned to capitalize on opportunities as the economy rebounds. Kaiser has positioned itself as a low-cost producer, and a focus on customer satisfaction is expected to continue to drive growth, Quast said.

The company’s business model focuses on long-term financial performance with an emphasis on maintaining a competitive advantage in markets with high barrier to entry and a global reach.

A 15-year Renaissance Zone was approved by the Michigan Economic Development Corp. for the Kaiser site in Kalamazoo. The company also received some training grants from the state. Smith said 2.5 million square feet of space has been leased in the Midlink Business Park since 2005.

“Kaiser is the continued evolution of our success,” Smith said.

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