

Jet engine supplier opens in North Charleston

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NORTH CHARLESTON -- The aviation industry took another step forward in the Lowcountry on Wednesday as Venture Aerobearings unveiled its plant that will supply parts for jet engines. About 100 people are expected to be employed at the Palmetto Commerce Park facility by the end of next year.

The company is a joint venture between GE Aviation and the SKF Group of Sweden. It will manufacture bearings for GE jet engines, including those used on the Boeing 787 Dreamliner. Sections of the Dreamliner's fuselage are being manufactured and integrated at Vought Aircraft Industries and Global Aeronautica in North Charleston.

About 20 people work at Venture Aerobearings, including the management team and some engineers. By the end of next year, when the plant is fully operational, it should employ about 100 people, said Vivek Kudva, supply chain manager at the plant.

At the ceremony, North Charleston Mayor Keith Summey; Jack Ellenberg, deputy secretary for new investment at the S.C. Department of Commerce; and Charleston County Council vice chairman Joe McKeown joined executives with GE and SKF in touting Venture as an economic boon to the region.

"In the Charleston region in recent years, we have had the great fortune of celebrating events like this, particularly in the aviation industry," McKeown said, saying the tri-county area could become a hotbed for aviation research and development. "It's easy to take these ribbon-cuttings for granted."

Venture chose the Ladson area in North Charleston because GE already has an S.C. presence and because the state offered to assist in employee training efforts, said Ernest Marshall, GE Aviation's global leader for supply chain and human resources.

The company began testing equipment recently but isn't yet ready for production. It continues to receive shipments of million-dollar lathes and other machinery through the Port of Charleston and other East Coast ports, Kudva said. Right now, Venture has nine machines.

"That's about an eighth of what we will have," he said.

And Venture has room to grow. About 25,000 of the building's 125,000 square feet will remain open for expansion, Kudva said. In addition, a back wall can be expanded to add space, he said.

The company has orders through 2012, Kudva said.

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