

IOI adds 25 jobs

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Industrial Opportunities Inc. in Andrews will be adding 25 full-time employees to its payroll.

The plant was awarded a two-year contract to manufacture A-22 cargo bags for the U.S. military.

The cargo bags will be used to airdrop supplies and equipment to ground troops in Afghanistan. There also is the possibility of the contract being extended for a third year.

Josh Carpenter, economic development director for Cherokee County, announced the expansion during Tuesday's county commission meeting.

"Everyday for the next two years, people can get up and know they have jobs," Carpenter said.

The plant's workforce is nearly 400 strong, including 100 adults with disabilities who are in vocational training. Since the manufacturer came to Andrews in 2003, the total wages and benefits added to the local economy total more than \$43 million. The plant manufactures more than 100 different products, many of which service military or law enforcement sectors, according to IOI.

"Tom [O'Brien] has really saved our community for jobs," District I Commissioner Steve Jordan said.

Seven of the 25 new employees are expected to be hired by the end of the week. The increase in workers will bring the annual payroll and benefits to more than \$9 million, said Tom O'Brien, chief executive officer of IOI.

"I am very proud of the IOI workforce and their ability and versatility to continue to change from one product to another on short notice. There is an urgent and compelling need for this product; IOI was contacted 60 days ago to see if they were willing and able to manufacture the A-22 cargo bag on a fast delivery schedule."

"With the confidence of the IOI skilled workforce, the IOI management team stepped up to the challenge and committed IOI to start delivering by Dec. 1 or sooner," O'Brien said.

Due to the drop in sewing jobs associated with the loss of local manufacturing plants, there is less of a capacity for skilled workers in that field, Carpenter said. Tri-County Community College in Peachtree, an IOI partner, is offering a specialized industrial sewing program.

The manufacturing space for the new workers was supported by the N.C. Rural Economic Development Center, Advantage West, N.C. Department of Commerce and other state and local agencies.

Cherokee Scout Staff Writer Dwight Otwell contributed to this report.