



RANDY DOCKENDORF/P&D

Wildcat Manufacturing general manager Scott Eberts stands in front of a TR626 Trommel Screen at the Freeman plant. The TR626 by Wildcat is a self-contained, portable screening plant designed for the organic and wood-waste industries and is ideal for finishing compost,

recycling, or topsoil reclamation. Wildcat Manufacturing was founded in 1973 and moved to its current location in Freeman the following year. The plant, located along U.S. Highway 81, employs 55 full-time employees and serves the global recycling market.

District III Turns Plans Into Realities

BY ANDREW ATWAL
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South Dakota features planning districts, which are associations of local governments (county, city and tribal) in many of the districts across the state. District III, which encompasses Bon Homme, Hutchinson, Douglas, Charles Mix and Yankton counties, among others, helps to provide planning and development, improve the quality of government services and save costs by providing one source for specialized services.



Henderson

"District III is a regional development organization that helps local governments and the private sector with various projects," said director Greg Henderson. "We work on pretty much every kind of major problem."

The main goal of all the planning committees across the state is to provide comprehensive development assistance to its membership and to organizations and businesses in the private sector. They offer a wide range of services that help their region maintain public services and expand economic opportunities.

Among the projects the group has taken on in Yankton County in 2011 included a sewer system, which the Timberland Park Homeowner's Association sought. The group also helped the City of Yankton with the East Highway 50 lift station. However, the group denied an application for the Volin Rural Fire Association's proposal for

DISTRICT | PAGE 18B

Freeman Firm Doesn't Waste An Opportunity

Wildcat Manufacturing Taps Global Recycling Market

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FREEMAN — At Wildcat Manufacturing, general manager Scott Eberts sees waste as a good thing.

Or more accurately, he likes the opportunity that his plant's equipment offers for putting waste to good use.

"We design and manufacture equipment that serves the global organic recycling market," said Eberts, general manager of the Freeman plant since October 2009.

The plant specializes in products in demand for environmental reasons, Eberts said. In that respect, "going green" has been good for his business, he said.

But if recycling offers new avenues, the plant itself isn't new to Freeman, a Hutchinson County community of about 1,300 residents.

Wildcat Manufacturing has remained part of the Freeman business scene for nearly four decades. Wildcat was founded in 1973, and the business moved to its current location in Freeman the following year. Wildcat has been owned by Vermeer of Pella, Iowa, since 2009.

Wildcat Manufacturing, located along U.S. Highway 81, has remained one of Freeman's largest employers. The plant makes use of a wide variety of skilled workers.

"We currently have 55 full-time employees," he said. "We have machinists, welders, assemblers, engineers, finance and administrative staff."

Wildcat's core product lines are trommel screens and compost turners, Eberts said.

Trommel screens are primarily used in composting, organic recycling and soil reclamation applications, he said. The machine will separate a given material into two different-sized products.

"As an example, finished compost will contain a fraction of oversized particles that are not acceptable to the end user of the product," he said. "When this material is run through a trommel screen, those oversized particles can be separated out."

Compost turners are used in the composting process. One method of composting is done by putting organic material into windrows.

"Our compost turners straddle a windrow and have a rotating drum that passes through the windrowed material," he said. "The rotating drum mixes and aerates the material, providing an improved environment for the natural composting process."

The Wildcat plant also manufactures Vermeer's MX125 and MX240 products. These machines are drilling fluid mixing systems that couple with Vermeer's Horizontal Directional Drills.

"Wildcat's product is marketed through a global independent dealer network. Municipalities or companies that work with municipalities to process green waste and other organic material are the primary market for our trommel screens and compost turners."

SCOTT EBERTS

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Recycling remains strongly practiced, but the current economic downturn has affected Wildcat Manufacturing both nationally and globally, Eberts said. In turn, company officials have adjusted production to meet the changing market, he said.

"The economic slowdown in recent years has definitely provided challenges as customers have delayed their purchases of new equipment," he said. "One way we have adjusted is by manufacturing other Vermeer products like the MX125 and MX240."

Wildcat is also taking steps to maintain a skilled workforce, Eberts said. The issue of

workforce development is not limited to Freeman or even rural communities. As of last fall, the James River Valley — running the entire north-south length of South Dakota, from roughly Aberdeen to Yankton — had hundreds and even thousands of openings for manufacturing jobs.

Gov. Dennis Daugaard and state officials have made workforce development a priority.

At the local level, Wildcat Manufacturing has taken steps to create more training opportunities, Eberts said.

The Regional Technical Education Center (RTEC) in Yankton has worked with Wildcat officials on bringing a welding simulator to Freeman.

Wildcat is also working with local officials on training opportunities, Eberts said.

"Wildcat is partnering with the Freeman Community Development Corporation to bring weld training to our community," he said. "Skilled welders are in high demand in the region for manufacturing jobs and we don't see this going away. Welding is a key part of our manufacturing process, and as we continue to grow, we will need skilled welders."

As for the future, Eberts sees a continued strong demand for his company's recycling equipment.

"This market will continue to grow as more and more organic material is diverted from landfills to be recycled into valuable products like compost, fuel and mulch," he said.



RANDY DOCKENDORF

Wildcat Manufacturing has become a potent economic factor in the Freeman area since the company's founding in 1973.

*For your excellence in manufacturing,
your contribution to the community, and
your role in Yankton's growth...*



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