



COMING TO COLEMAN—Opening of a new hardwood flooring manufacturing facility at the former N.E.W. Plastics building on Hwy. 141 in Coleman was formally announced at a news conference Friday, Feb. 18 at Coleman Municipal Building. The new firm, North Woods, LLC, is expected to have 50 people working by early summer, and hopefully 100 or more within two years. A complicated financing package was arranged with the cooperation of several banks and governmental agencies, spearheaded by Marinette County Association for Business and Industry and its Executive Director Don Clewley and Heartland Business Bank of DePere. Clewley described the project as the largest he has ever worked on. Total dollar amount of the transactions was not revealed. Shown above left to right are some of the key people who made it happen, Coleman village trustees James Karban and Richard Patenaude; Craig Aderhold, Heartland Business Bank market president for Northeast Wisconsin; George Bousley, who chairs Marinette County Board and its Economic Development and Tourism Committee; Coleman Village President Glenn Woulf; Clewley; Tom Bieberitz, Marinette, president of the new firm, with his son Denin and wife Gay, and State Rep. John Gard, Peshtigo. Sen. Dave Hansen was also involved but was not able to be present for the announcement. The village was left without a major employer after both N.E.W. Plastics and Seneca Foods closed their Coleman operations.

Announce Plans To Open New Flooring Factory In Coleman

Formal announcement was made at 2:30 p.m. Friday, March 18 that a newly organized hardwood flooring manufacturer will begin operations soon in the former N.E.W. Plastics building on Hwy. 141 in Coleman. Tom Bieberitz, Rader Road, Marinette, president of North Wood Flooring, LLC, said no specific date has been set for accepting job applications, but he expects to be up and running before summer. The firm will start with 50 employees, skilled and unskilled, which he hopes will increase to a second shift and 100 or more employees in the second year. He said intentions are to provide well-paying jobs with good benefits for the people of the area.

Coleman has been hit with a double economic whammy in recent years with the closing of both N.E.W. Plastics and the Seneca Foods canning factory, firms which had been the two major employers in the village. It was obvious the arrival of a new manufacturer was good news to the village officials present. "This is a big day for our village," President Glenn Woulf declared.

"This is an exciting day for my wife and myself," Bieberitz said after introducing his wife Gay and 9-year-old son Denin at the Friday afternoon news conference in Coleman Municipal Building. "I'm excited to have a great family, friends and colleagues to work with," Bieberitz said his firm will manufacture unfinished strips for hardwood floors, describing it as, "a great product, user friendly and environmentally safe." He said later that northern grown hardwoods, such as the type raised in Wisconsin and Michigan's Upper Peninsula, produce a type of wood far superior to southern grown timber for hardwood floors.

With them were Coleman village officials, Village President Glenn Woulf; Trustees Jim Karban, Richard Patenaude and Larry Wilson, and Clerk/Treasurer Bev Noffke; Don Clewley, executive director of Marinette County Association for Business and Industry; Rep. John Gard of Peshtigo, Speaker of the State Assembly; Marinette County Board Chair George Bousley, Niagara; Craig Aderhold and Julie Lemminger of Heartland Business Bank, DePere; Richard Cromell, the new president of Associated Bank, Keith Shallow of Peshtigo National Bank, and others. Sen. Dave Hansen was unable to be present, but was also instrumental in making the new business a reality.

"This has been a long process," Bieberitz said of organizing the company, arranging acquisition of the former N.E.W. plastics building and arranging financing. "It's taught me a lesson. Surround yourself with good people... listen to their advice...and good things can happen." He described Vern Vincent, former owner of the N.E.W. Plastics building as "a genuine

person," who was "very concerned with taking care of the people here". Aderhold, he said, was "a wonderful inspiration".

He expressed special thanks to Clewley, Bousley, Gard, Hansen, County Administrator Steve Corbeille. Of Clewley, Bieberitz commented, "He's been there. He's made a lot of things happen for us."

Bieberitz said he has been in the wood business for 20 years. His experience includes manufacture of plywood, dimensional lumber products such as window and door frames, and hardwood flooring. He is originally from the Manitowoc area and has lived in or near Marinette for about 10 years. "This is home now, we like it here," he said of the Marinette County area.

Closing of the real estate and financial arrangements should be complete in a few weeks, and the ground work should be laid. Some time after that Bieberitz plans to advertise when and where prospective employees can apply for work.

"My goal is to hire good people and pay them what they're worth....We want to be friends to the community...I want people to know there's lots of opportunity," Bieberitz concluded.

He said the property is 15 acres, so there's space to expand. In future they may add dry kilns and other processes to their operations. "This is just the start of the future."

He believes the new business and employment opportunities will benefit people not only in Coleman but also in Pound, Lena, Peshtigo, Marinette and more. "We're all one family."

Clewley opened formal comments with the explanation that Marinette County Association for Business and Industry (MCABI) is the economic development arm of Marinette County. As its director, he also handles administrative details for Marinette County Industrial Development Corporation (MCIDC), which administers state and federal economic development grants and loans as well as the county's own revolving loan fund.

Clewley said he was involved with the original Coleman Products, and then with N.E.W. Plastics, and was asked by village officials to help find a use for the N.E.W. building after the firm's closing was announced. "It took over a year to bring this project to reality," Clewley declared, describing it as one of the largest he has ever worked on. "North Wood Flooring will be a valuable asset to the community." He looks for the firm to have "a lot of years of prosperity and a lot of years in the Coleman area."

Clewley said as the project moved forward, Woulf "shepherded us along and kept us on our toes," with Karban's help. He thanked Gard, Hansen, Bousley and Corbeille, and particularly the people at Heartland

Business Bank, who helped structure the entire financing package, working with Dan Tim, Stevens Point, on SBA's 504 loan program; Keith Shallow of Peshtigo National Bank; Wisconsin Department of Commerce; MCIDC, and Todd Thornton of Northern Initiatives, a venture capital group in Marquette, Mich., which he described as, "one crucial part of the puzzle." Northern Initiatives, Clewley said later, is partly funded by the state of Michigan and is authorized to help promote projects in Michigan and adjoining counties in the states that surround it, including Wisconsin. Clewley feels the Michigan backing may have helped convince Wisconsin Department of Commerce to participate as well.

Clewley expressed appreciation for Aderhold's leadership in getting all the partners to the table.

Bousley said it wouldn't have happened without the cooperation of the people in Coleman, particularly Woulf and Karban.

"We can really be thankful that we've got someone like John (Gard) on our side," Bousley said, adding that Gard helped on this project, and as to the highway 141 interchange at Coleman, "John made that happen." He added, "What John says he'll do, he does...if he can't, he'll tell you...I look upon him as a friend."

Woulf thanked Bousley for his work on Coleman's behalf, and Bousley commented, "Any time I can help you out, it's a benefit to Niagara too and a benefit to the entire county."

Gard said he was proud to be part of helping someone open a business - "it's a part of the American dream." He cited Clewley, Bousley, Woulf and Karban as being very instrumental in convincing the Department of Commerce to provide some of the funding. "Everyone knows the difficult straits Coleman has been in," Gard declared. "I'm glad the state was able to help a little bit."

"This is part of a lot of good things that will happen here...I predict bright futures for Lena, Coleman and Pound," Gard said, noting Lena is his own home town.

Sen. Hansen, thanked residents of Coleman "for the opportunity to help bring these important jobs back to Coleman," and said working to create good paying, family-supporting jobs has been one of his priorities since being elected State Senator. While Wisconsin has had success in restoring lost manufacturing jobs and turning the economy around, "there are still some areas like Coleman who have been working hard to do the same thing, but who the economy has not yet caught up with."

In a letter sent since he could not attend, he wrote, "The backbone of our society...is the belief that everyone who wants to work should be able to, at a job that meets his or her needs. With

the loss of the community's manufacturing base, that hasn't been the case for some time now for everyone in Coleman.

"So when I was asked to help Tom Bieberitz and North Wood Flooring create new good paying jobs in Coleman, I knew I had to do all I could to help make this new dream a reality. It has always been a great pleasure of mine to work with fine people like Don Clewley, Glenn Woulf and George Bousley, but even more so on this project because this is about more than just creating new jobs. I believe this project is a step toward creating a manufacturing cluster in our area that will lead to additional business growth centered around the flooring industry and that will, in turn, create new jobs and improve the quality of life for Coleman and our entire area."

"Dave (Hansen) and John (Gard) did a lot of lobbying for us to get the state to help on this deal," Clewley commented.

Later Woulf mentioned the Department of Commerce at first said they were not interested in helping finance the North Woods project. Then they found Bousley knew Commerce Secretary Corey Nettles, and a Marinette County contingent consisting of Clewley, Bousley, Bieberitz, Woulf and County Administrator Steve Corbeille went to Madison, where they joined Gard and Hansen and their assistants for a conference with Nettles and other Commerce staff in their offices. Before the group was back in Coleman they received a call via cell phone advising that the Community Development Block Grant for Economic Development application would be approved. The \$200,000 grant, which will go as a loan to North Woods, LLC and remain with Marinette County's revolving loan fund as it is repaid. Next step to be taken in obtaining the funds is a public participation meeting scheduled for 1:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 16 at Coleman Municipal Building. A grant requirement is that a specified percentage of the jobs created must go to low or moderate income people.

Woulf thanked everyone for taking so much time "to help our little community. I'm really pleased with the work the county has done on this," He added Clewley had worked particularly hard on it, and Bousley was always ready to help, and to return telephone calls any time of the day or night. He said this is the second time Bousley has gotten involved in solving Coleman's problems. The first was when it was learned the state Department of Transportation did not include a full interchange at Coleman in Hwy. 141 reconstruction plans. Those plans now do include a full 4-way interchange, "and he helped make it happen."

"All this shows there's no "I" in "team";" Clewley commented. "It shows things can be done with everyone working together. This is truly an entrepreneurial story...This is what America is about."