

Pfizer closure throws 200 Valley jobs into jeopardy

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Pfizer, the pharmaceutical giant which produces well-known products such as Visine and Viagra, will be leaving Arnprior by 2008.

A major part of that town's industrial base, the company has provided well-paid work for its 195 employees since the company opened its Madawaska Boulevard plant in 1956.

A delegation of local notables visited Pfizer management in the mid-1950s at their U.S. headquarters to convince them to establish a manufacturing and distribution centre in Arnprior.

Since then the company's presence in Arnprior has always been a point of local pride and obtaining employment with the company has always been a sign of success that came with excellent benefits.

As recently as two years ago, the plant undertook a

major expansion and security measures were updated over the past year to bring it to world-class standards.

However, with Pfizer Arnprior divesting itself of such products as Visine, to Johnson and Johnson, the local plant would lose up to half of its production runs.

"Following two major acquisitions by Pfizer since 2000, our manufacturing network has an excess of capacity worldwide," said MacDara Lynch, vice-president of manufacturing.

The company will be reducing its facilities worldwide from 93 to 62.

John Carkner, Pfizer's local site leader, told *Metro-land Newspapers* that the new products coming down the pipe from Pfizer do not fit the Arnprior plant's capabilities. That played a major role in the decision to close down the plant.

However, Carkner is hopeful that the plant will remain open – though under a new banner.

"I hope to see this plant continue as an on-going pharmaceutical facility," he said.

Although he could provide no details of current discussions, Carkner did confirm that Pfizer is currently negotiating with other companies in the industry with an eye toward one of them acquiring the facility.

"Our goal is to have a resolution of this by the end of 2006," Carkner added.

In the meantime, Pfizer employees can expect no more than the usual seasonal fluctuations in employment levels.

Layoffs – if negotiations are not successful – would likely not begin to take a toll until the end of 2007.

That period of breathing room gives local officials hope.

Arnprior Mayor Terry Gibeau has pledged to do whatever he can to facilitate any transition to a new company.

"The window of over a year is hopeful," Gibeau commented. "I believe there will be a solution to this problem."

He is remaining positive and hopes those directly affected by last week's announcement do also.

"It is a shock for the community whenever you get an announcement of this magnitude," Gibeau said. However, he pointed out that the town has weathered the storm before and came out ahead. He referred to the recent pull-out of Boeing and the acquisition of the plant by Arnprior Aerospace.

Pfizer has promised to keep its employees fully informed of the latest developments and to provide whatever assistance it can during any transition.

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