

10/24/2004

ACI breaks ground for new facility

CHAD NATION , Staff Writer



Staff photos/Chad Nation - Above, ACI management, community leaders and building officials broke ground on the new ACI facility, which will be located on Nebraska Avenue in the Bluffs Vision II subdivision in Mid-American Commerce Park.

It's been a busy month at Automated Concepts Inc.

The business, currently located at 3215 Nebraska Ave., is an industry leader in robotics system integration and provides custom turnkey solutions for many large and small companies, including several Fortune 500 firms.

On Oct. 1, ACI merged its operations with Meritage Manufacturing Solutions, of Warrenville, Ill.

Under the new agreement, Sierra Concepts, based in Santa Fe Springs, Calif., owner of MMS, became the majority stake holder in ACI.

By joining the two operations, the business will be able to grant customers expanded capabilities as well as enhanced operational efficiencies, according to John Burg, CEO of ACI.

On Friday, ACI broke ground on a new 65,000-square-foot facility that will expand its Council Bluffs operations.

The long awaited expansion comes at a time when business is booming.

"We have been waiting for a little while to build this facility. A couple of downturns in the economy have pushed it back, but, now, our business is up substantially," Burg said.

ACI is experiencing a 60 percent growth in new orders in fiscal 2004 over 2003 from a wide variety of industries.

"We need to finish the building quickly," Burg told the gathered crowd, "so if you have any free weekends, we could use a hand."

The new state-of-the-art facility is expected to be completed by April 15.

Brian Turner, general manager of ACI, said that the building will have added space for training, demonstrations, lab areas and expanded floor space for system assembly and integration.

"We are looking for our business production to increase by 20 to 30 percent in 2005, so we are going to need the space," Turner said.

Council Bluffs Mayor Tom Hanafan attended the ceremony and congratulated ACI on the project.

"I passed a woman on my way here, and she asked me, 'Tom, what the heck are you building today?' That's good news that people are seeing the direction that the city is taking, and businesses like ACI are a part of that growth," Hanafan said.

Marlo Burg, co-founder and chairman of the ACI board, said that construction of the building would be his "hands-on swan

song."

"Council Bluffs has been a wonderful location for ACI. For over a decade we have had the full support Mayor Hanafan, the Board of Supervisors and the state of Iowa," Burg said.

Council Bluffs Area Chamber of Commerce president Bob Mundt said that ACI is the type of company that has growth potential and is beneficial to Iowa.

"These are ideal jobs; the kind that allow people to buy homes and have more spendable income. These types of careers make a big impact on the economy," he said.

State Senate Minority Leader Mike Gronstal said that there are three sectors of jobs - advanced manufacturing, information technology and life sciences - that are considered beneficial to the Iowa economy.

"Automated Concepts offer jobs that are high-wage, high-skilled positions that really keep our children and grandchildren in this area," Gronstal said.

©Daily Nonpareil 2004