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Sun Dolphin kayak manufacturer prepares to add 60 jobs with expansion



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NORTON SHORES, MI -- The company that makes Sun Dolphin kayaks is gearing up to add 60 jobs, machinery and a warehouse between locations in Muskegon and Norton Shores.

KL Outdoor, also known as Ameriform, makes a variety of plastic form recreation equipment under the Sun Dolphin brand, including kayaks, canoes, paddleboards, hunting blinds and sleds.

"We believe we're the largest manufacturer of small boats under one name," said Dave Harris, vice president.

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The boats – handiwork of Muskegon-area workers – are distributed worldwide, he said.

Locally, they can be found at Dunham's, Dick's Sporting Goods and Wal-Mart.

The company employs 420 people (including temps) at multiple factories near Sherman Boulevard and U.S. 31 in Muskegon County.

An investment of \$1.4 million in a new building and machinery will allow the company to move warehousing to a facility at 1224 E. Pontaluna Road in Norton Shores, making room for additional manufacturing equipment at its existing factories, Harris said.

The Norton Shores warehouse will require 8-10 new employees, he said.

KL will install two more thermal forming machines in areas that were used for warehousing in the city of Muskegon, he said. Adding those machines translates to 50 more jobs, and allows expansion of all product lines.

The city of Norton Shores approved a 12-year tax abatement for the \$1.4 million building investment on Tuesday, Oct. 4.

City officials estimate collection of about \$3,920 in additional taxes during the first year, and abatement of an equal amount. All taxing entities combined will collect an additional \$21,655.

"The city is pleased to be able to help a local manufacturer continue to grow," said Mark Meyers, city administrator.

Tax abatements are one of the only economic incentives a city can offer, said Mayor Gary Nelund, in a previous interview. The expansions they help facilitate means the city will collect more taxes in the future.

"It's an investment on our behalf," he said.



Muskegon manufacturer of Sun Dolphin kayaks planning \$5 million expansion

In 2014, KL was awarded a 12-year tax abatement from the city of Muskegon when it invested \$5 million, added four thermal forming machines and had plans to hire 50 people. The abatement was on \$375,000 of real property improvements, and worth \$43,707 annually, with the city's portion being \$13,841 -- the same amounts were abated.

Since 2010, the company has added 300 jobs, invested \$15 million and added 300,000 square feet to its facilities, according to the company's tax abatement application to the city of Norton Shores, prepared by Harris.

KL has been in the city of Muskegon since 1989. It was founded in 1982 in Grand Rapids. The new warehouse will be its first building in Norton Shores.

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