

Shuttered Oakland factory bought



Oakland Tribune

January 21, 2009 | George Avalos

OAKLAND -- A stalwart of the Bay Area industrial sector will sweeten the future of the former Sconza Candy factory here by expanding at the shuttered site.

Broadway Mechanical-Contractors Inc., through a realty partnership, has bought the old candy manufacturing complex in east Oakland for \$3.5 million. Broadway Mechanical is spending about \$1 million to renovate the site.

Sconza closed the factory last fall when it moved its candy manufacturing to the Central Valley city of Oakdale.

"We're not slowing down in this economy," said Fred Nurisso, Broadway Mechanical's chief executive officer. "We are trying to be proactive and not be daunted by this economy."

Broadway Mechanical already owns a site at 873 81st Avenue, a short distance to the east of the professional football-baseball- basketball sports complexes in Oakland. The Sconza site is next door to the Broadway Mechanical's existing operations.

At present, the company's primary products are plumbing, heating, and air conditioning systems, along with some steel pipe fabrication. The new site next door will enable Broadway Mechanical to expand the array of products it can offer to include larger-diameter pipes.

"We are very entrenched in the high-rise market, but we knew that would come to a halt," Nurisso said. "We are finishing up some high-rise projects. But we also have secured some larger hospital-type projects."

Broadway Mechanical expects to be operating in the expansion site in about six months. Initially it expects to hire about five new employees to work at the new facility. But over a subsequent period, 20 people could be working in the new sheet-metal fabrication operations, Nurisso said.

The departure of the Sconza factory cost Oakland about 115. For that reason, the corporate resurrection of the defunct plant is welcome news for city officials.

"When Broadway Mechanical looked at that site, we were pleased," said Aliza Gallo, a city economic development official. "They are a strong company and they are in expansion mode."

Oakland has been increasing its efforts in that part of the city, she added.

"We want to retain Broadway Mechanical and help them expand," Gallo said. "We want to be sure they are successful."

Broadway Mechanical believes it can use its health-care projects, as well as public works projects spurred by government spending programs, to bolster its finances during the slump in construction of office, hotel, retail and industrial buildings.

"The past six to nine months have crippled a lot of companies," Nurisso said. "The companies that are entrenched financially, larger companies such as ours, should be able to weather the storm."

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