

Glass plant closes, putting 150 people out of work

By **JASON MISNER**
The Champion

The Owens-Illinois (O-I) Canada glass manufacturing plant, formerly known as Consumers Glass, has closed down, putting approximately 150 people out of work.

The 23-year-old, 300,000-square-foot plant officially shut its doors yesterday. Employees were told about the closure last month.

About 15 trades employees will remain at the Chisholm Drive plant to dismantle existing equipment. That's expected to take until at least the end of January.

The plant contains three machines and one furnace that manufactures beer bottles.

Irv Farr, president of the United Steelworkers of America Local 269, said poor sales of O-I's products and the fact that \$18 million that was required to upgrade the aging Milton plant forced the closure.

"We've gone a long time without being updated or modernized," Mr. Farr said from his Cambridge home yesterday. "We've been promised a rebuilding on the (23-year-old) furnace for years and years. It never happened because we kept it running."

O-I Canada officials couldn't be reached for comment.

In a press release, company vice-president and general manager

Robert Smith said: "We sincerely regret having to make this decision. However, due to the expectations of glass container demand in 2004 we have concluded that we can continue to provide good service to our customers by consolidating operations and transferring capacity to our other North American facilities."

O-I is the largest manufacturer of glass containers in North America, South America, Australia and New Zealand, and one of the largest in Europe. O-I also is a worldwide manufacturer of plastics packaging.

The Milton plant was one of six glass container plants acquired by O-I from Consumers Packaging Inc. in 2001.

Mr. Farr, a millwright with the plant since it opened in 1980, said there wasn't much the union could do to stop the Milton plant closure.

"We tried to get the best we could for the employees," he said.

That included a decent severance package and offering a drop-in centre for workers to help them find new jobs.

The centre will operate "until it's not needed anymore. All employees will be notified about it," Mr. Farr said. "I have to upgrade myself."

The closure is difficult to come to grips with, he said.

"We feel strange having to go back out looking for a job again," he said. "Some people took it hard. It's a computer world. Lots of different skills sets are required."

Milton native Gwen Buckley, married with two teenage daughters, said the news hasn't hit her yet. Working in quality control, she finished her final shift last Tuesday.

"I don't think reality has set in yet," she said, noting she'll get a year's severance. "In the new year, when it's time to go back to work and I'm not, it will hit me."

She made great friends, Ms Buckley said.

"I've put that many years in and I'm sorry to see it go. It was a good place. We will all keep in touch."

She said she'll be pounding the pavement looking for another job and is considering going back to school.

Mayor Gord Krantz said about three or four months ago he and Town staff spoke to O-I Canada to see how things were going, and weren't told about any potential closure.

"It certainly is a loss to the tax structure," he said. "We will be actively pursuing it (the building) for potential users for it."

Jason Misner can be reached at jmisner@miltoncanadianchampion.com.

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