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FlexForm expands Elkhart facility **New production line promises to bring more jobs.**

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ELKHART -- FlexForm Technologies had a big decision to make.

The company, which produces composite panels for automotive and office applications, could expand its operations in either New York or right here in Indiana.

It chose the latter.

"We just felt it economically made sense for us," said Gregg Baumbaugh, chief executive for FlexForm, 4955 Beck Drive. The company is investing more than \$5 million into a new production line and doubling its work force.

The Indiana Economic Development Corp. had offered FlexForm \$51,500 in grants and up to \$215,000 in tax credits to encourage the company to grow in Indiana. On top of that, the city of Elkhart offered the company tax abatement worth an estimated \$259,000 over a three-year period. These incentives, combined with the fact that it would be less expensive to do business in Indiana than in New York, encouraged FlexForm to stay and to grow its business here at home.

The company expects to add 39 new positions by 2009, including manufacturing, supervisory and administrative positions. The new jobs will follow the completion of a 41,000-square-foot addition to FlexForm's Elkhart building that will house its new office panel production line.

Construction began this month, and company officials expect to begin producing the new panels in the fourth quarter this year.

FlexForm said its expansion brings diversity to the company's traditionally automotive-focused offerings and allows the company to produce flame retardant drop-in replacement panels for cubicle walls.

The company, which developed the technology, acquired the equipment to produce the new product from a defunct manufacturer in New York. The company filed for a patent for its new technology several years ago, Baumbaugh said, adding that a handful of other companies are pursuing this type of technology nationally. FlexForm's decision to stay in Indiana is evidence that the state is working hard to reach out to companies and to help them understand that the state values their growth, said Nathan Feltman, Indiana secretary of commerce and chief executive of the Indiana Economic Development Corp. In fact, last year alone, 186 companies chose Indiana over other states, promising 22,000 new jobs over the next few years.

"Any new job in Indiana is a good opportunity," Feltman said. "Whether it's 39 or it's 2,000 with Honda."

It's a good opportunity not just for the company involved, but for the surrounding area as well, said Dorinda Heiden, president of the Economic Development Corp. of Elkhart County.

It's called the multiplier effect, she said. More jobs here equals more people opening up bank accounts, buying homes and buying cars.

And FlexForm's expansion is just the first of a number of additions it plans to undertake in the future, Baumbaugh said. "We have 10 acres total," he said. "So we definitely have room for expansion."