

State News

DailyComet

#Wkter gdx{ /#Qdir xuf kh#Sduvk/#Qr xlvldqd##P dj /#64/#5338

#P dnh#Kv# r xu#
#Krp hsdj hf
#Krp h

P dj /#63 /#5338/#0=6; SP #

#P dnhv6af h
#F dlvvlihg
#I qg##M e
#Vxevf ueh#Qr z
#Sxedf #Qr vf hv
#Qhz v

Fur z dh| # r p sdqlhv# dp e#edf n#w #suh0 iluh#hyho

The Associated Press

#Dr f d#
##v/vln#
#Qdvr qd#
##Z r ug#
#Edj r x#Exvlqhv#
Uhyhz #
#P dnhvZ d#k#
##Relvxduhv#
#Srd f h#Uhsr uw#
##Z hdvkh#
##W gdl `v#Skr w v#

It took two years for LA PAC Manufacturing Inc. to build a new plastic bag factory after fire destroyed their old one. But owners Peter and David John kept LA PAC open, even when they had to get competitors to fill their orders.

#/sr uw
##Khdgdqhv#
#F r x p qlvw

"We're on our way, working our way back to where we were," Peter John said Friday, during an open house Friday for the new building.

Featured Advertiser



Luntz 15 inch Ratchet Screwdriver Set - Great for Father's Day Gift!
- View Entire Ad -

#Rslqr q
##F r x p qlvw
##Iglw udo#
##Dhwnu#
##I r x p v#
hdvkuhv
##Dσ qj #kh#Edj r x
##F r x p qlvw#
##Wkh#J udshylq#
##Khdok#P dwnu#

It houses both the Louisiana Bag distributorship, which is more than 50 years old, and LA PAC, founded in 1992 to make woven polypropylene bags.

#F dhdqgdv
##F dhdqgdv#
##Vsr uw#F dhdqgdv
#/huylf hv
##Saf h#dq#Dg#
##Der xv#kh#Gdlq #
Fr p h#
##/vlii#Guhf w u #
##F r p p xqlv#Dqnv#
##Qhz vsdshw#q#
Hgx f dvr q#
##M ev#Ivk#Kv#

The old site, a half-mile down American Legion Drive, is still littered with burnt equipment.

At the new factory, small plastic bags, each containing a pebble, were piled in a basket labeled "Souvenirs from Burn Site." A wall of framed newspapers hung at the entrance of the building as reminders of the five-alarm fire that destroyed the old site on Easter 2003.

The fire started just before 9:30 p.m. that April 20. Thirteen fire departments needed 17 hours to get it under control.

Some people were working, but no one was injured. Both owners were out of town. LA PAC's general manager, Edward Leger, was the first official to arrive.

"When I arrived, there was no fire coming out of the building. But, when I went inside to look, the whole side wall of the warehouse was



VHDL



EURZ
GD\ V

Vhdf

Wrg

Jr##

missing. They were right; it was bad."

Leger remembers that a fireman told him, "I'm sorry to see you lose your job." Leger answered, "We're not closed!"

Fire investigators found that the blaze started within a forklift, said Peter John.

He got off a plane in Amsterdam only to learn that his building no longer existed. "I had to go right to the ticket counter to get another ticket and fly directly back."

Soon after the blaze, workers began cleaning up and moving items.

"I don't think we were off a whole week and we were back in business," said Thaddeus Nolan, who has been with the company for five years. "The people at Louisiana Bag weren't off at all. We never stopped."

Louisiana Bag used a site it already owned on U.S. Route 90, and LA PAC took over the former Crowley Garment Factory.

"Sometimes we worked till 9, 10 o'clock at night taking stuff in, but we never stopped," Nolan said.

However, about 85 of the 146 workers had to be laid off.

Leger said some were able to get jobs with the competitors helping LA PAC with production. As the company gets back on its feet, it is hiring back some of the laid off workers.

"I worked here about two years before the fire, and then I left, then I came back," Gordon Blount said. "I've been back for about three months."

The companies have a little over 100 workers now, and expect to get back to pre-fire levels.

"We have more equipment coming," Leger said. "That's what this building is - it's self-sufficiency."

Almost all every customer agreed to wait for shipments due when the fire broke out, Leger said. "I lost one customer, that's it," he said. "Everyone else stood by us, they worked with us."

Leger was able to buy and borrow equipment from competitors, and bought bags from them.

"We had over 3 million bags on order at the time of the fire. I had over a million and a half bags that were ready to ship that were destroyed in

the fire, so I had over 4 1/2 million bags to make with no way to make them."

One competitor, Intertape Polymer Group, formerly Cajun Bag, lent tables, tools, sewing machines and cutting equipment, said Bryan Maraist, operations manager with Intertape Polymer.

"We wanted to help out as much as possible just because we've known the vulnerability of that type of business, and it could happen to anyone," Maraist said.

David John said he didn't consider calling it quits. "Never ever; not for a second."

Peter John admits the idea crossed his mind. He said he stuck with it because of the workers.

"We have such a great group of people that we work with here. You just get inspired, you get motivated and you see their spirit and enthusiasm and you have to keep going forward," he said.

Information from: The Advertiser,



The newspaper that pays for itself!
Click here to subscribe now!