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Organizations seek job openings for Pinova employees, others ponder site reuse

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Jul 1, 2023



A few months after an April fire caused significant damage, Pinova announced Wednesday it was shutting down its Brunswick plant. Michael Hall/The Brunswick News

Local business organizations are asking for the community's help in finding new jobs for Pinova employees who are reeling in the wake of the announcement the plant is closing.

The call for aid comes as local environmental groups consider what the closing means to cleanup efforts at the site.

The Brunswick Golden Isles Chamber of Commerce announced Friday that it is working with the Golden Isles Development Authority to find local jobs for displaced Pinova employees to fill.



“The major issue I hear about when I talk to businesses every day has been the difficulty finding talent,” said chamber CEO Ralph Staffins in a message sent Friday to chamber members. “While we will pray for the families that lost their jobs this week, we also know that this is an opportunity for many of your businesses as there is a new pool of skilled and trained workers to hire from.”

Pinova, a wood rosin producer that was operating out of a 112-year-old facility in Brunswick, announced this week it is closing permanently following the damage caused to the facility by a massive fire on April 15. The development authority said this week that Pinova employed 220 people.

Staffins said chamber and development authority teams have remained in constant contact with Pinova throughout the closing process and are awaiting a complete list of skillsets employees possess.

Staffins also asked local businesses to provide a list of job openings they have to add to a webpage at www.KeepGlynnRunning.com/Pinova.

“If you have any openings we ask that you send the positions, websites where posted, as well as contact information for the person who can point through this process to answer any questions and represent your business at possible job fairs,” Staffins wrote.

The postings will be on the website and sent directly by email to all Pinova employees, he said.

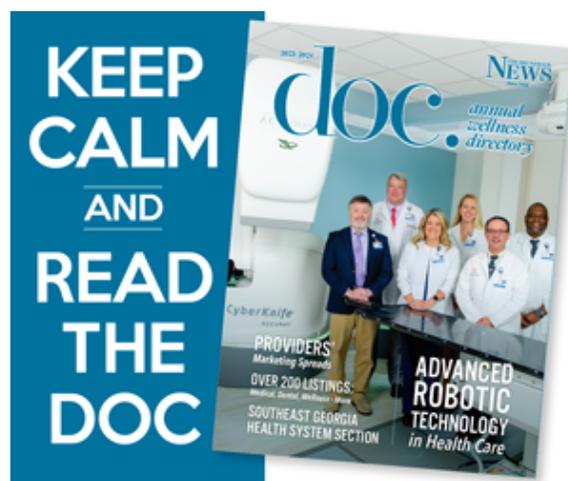
The chamber and development authority are also planning a job fair that will be hosted at Pinova in the coming weeks, possibly between July 10 and July 21.

Staffins said anyone with open positions or who wants to participate in the job fair should contact McKenzie Padgett at mpadgett@goldenisplesdev.com or Neally Alderman at nrogers@bgicoc.com.

Employees like Nick Shaw are grappling with an uncertain future after Pinova's announcement. He posted Thursday on Facebook that it is disheartening to hear the news, but he cherishes the relationships he built while working at Pinova.

"It is unfortunate and disheartening at times. However, I am grateful for the friendships and networking opportunities this chapter of my life has brought me," Shaw wrote. "The skills I have learned. The experience I have gained. I will carry these with me for the rest of my unwritten book. As one chapter will end a new chapter must begin until the book is completed."

Shaw said in the post that he has worked in an entry-level logistics position, operations, and maintenance at Pinova. He also served as the union vice president, he said.



On Friday he posted again to his Facebook page, this time to advertise his resume as a talented shift supervisor with years of experience overseeing employees.

All employees are on paid leave until July 10, company officials said this week, and will be paid for the next 60 days after that under protections provided by a federal law regulating large employer closings and layoffs.

Former employees were also shocked and saddened to hear the news of the plant's closure.

"Pinova was much more than just a business," said former vice president of operations at Pinova, Pat Grozier. "It was a unique and special family built by generations of smart, dedicated people. Pinova not only excelled at building lasting relationships with global customers and suppliers but also made involvement with local organizations and charities an important part of its mission.

"For employees, this company was a place to build lifelong friendships, provide for families and a place where countless sons, daughters and grandchildren got their first jobs. Although Pinova's doors are closing I am confident and thankful that the relationships created by Pinova will continue."

The local and personal impact of the closing has not been lost on Rachel Thompson, executive director of Glynn Environmental Coalition, which closely monitors the ongoing environmental cleanup at the factory site left by its previous tenant, Hercules.

“We acknowledge that for a lot of residents, this is something to celebrate when we think about environmental impacts,” she said. “But we can’t just look at that. Our mission statement is about creating a clean environment and a healthy economy. This is extremely devastating for our local economy and all the families who have been affected.”

Thompson said the environmental coalition hopes to have a seat at the table with local officials and other stakeholders about the future of the 152-acre site.

“We do not want this area to sit blighted and vacant,” she said. “It will take a lot of work to get where we want to go.”

Much of that work is already underway under the supervision of the state Environmental Protection Division. It is working with Pinova, which is a co-permittee on the environmental cleanup with Hercules, on a corrective action plan that seeks to remediate chromium in the soil and groundwater.

Thompson said she reached out to the EPD when the closing announcement was made to discuss the impacts it may have on the cleanup efforts. The EPD said nothing will change for the cleanup efforts and that, if anything, “the pace may accelerate due to the fact that there will no longer be operational infrastructure over existing areas of contamination,” an email to Thompson said.

It is still unknown how long that cleanup will take and exactly when the area will be available for reuse, Thompson said. The EPD said areas that are cleaned may be deemed suitable for reuse under Georgia’s brownfields act.

Development authority officials said this week that how the site is reused is a topic for future discussion and that the first step is ensuring the people who work at Pinova are able to find new jobs as soon as possible.

Company officials said fully shutting down the plant will take about 18 months.



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