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Pinova demolition, decommissioning, about half done

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A building is demolished at Pinova on Friday as part of the decommissioning of the 152-acre wood resin facility.

Michael Hall/The Brunswick News

The specialty rosin and polyterpene resins facility that once stood several stories tall at Pinova is now an empty space in the middle of the 152-acre facility surrounded by what seems to be arbitrary piles of rubble.

But each pile is being carefully curated by a demolition company that is taking down the dozens of buildings that once stood at the wood resin and chemicals plant that has been part of the Brunswick skyline and industrial economy for more than 100 years.

It's been 366 days since the April 15, 2023, fire that ravaged the production portion of the plant and prompted the closure of the facility. The fire burned for hours, sending a massive black plume of smoke into the air over the Golden Isles and requiring a regional response that included an air drop of firefighting materials to extinguish.



The plant ceased operations that day and never fully started again. Its closure was announced in June 2023, marking the end of more than a century of industrial activity at the site.

In the year since the fire, close to half of the demolition of the plant has been completed, said Ron Kurtz, Pinova's director of operations.

"A lot of this, by the end of June, it will be on the ground," Kurtz said, surveying the remains of buildings now in thousands of pieces.

The demolition company, AARC Environmental, paid Pinova around \$1 million for the opportunity to take apart the buildings, equipment, and materials and resell them, recycle them or properly dispose of them, Kurtz said. The company estimates it can make several million dollars in the process, he said.

Bricks from 100-year-old buildings will be resold as antique bricks. Equipment, like the massive stump grinder Pinova used as part of its processes, has been sold and is being taken apart. Metals that may be rare or only used for specific purposes are being sold or recycled. Even the timber from the utility poles that peppered the industrial landscape are being recycled, Kurtz said.

"There are a lot of exotic metals here, and most of them are being reused or recycled," Kurtz said.

He and nine other Pinova employees are still on site every day. The folks from AARC are hard at work demolishing buildings while the Pinova employees come behind them to ensure every last bit of material is removed.

Kurtz is working with Moran Environmental out of Jacksonville to ensure that hazardous materials in buildings and equipment are removed and properly disposed of before AARC demolishes a structure.

“If they run into something that needs addressing, I make sure it is clean,” Kurtz said.

Pinova also handled the removal of more than 94,000 tons of pine stumps the company used to make its products. Today, there are only 3,000 tons left. Those are destined for a similar facility in Turkey owned by the French company DRT, which was the parent company of Pinova.

DRT is owned by Firmenich International SA, a Swiss company that specializes in fragrances and flavors.



The demolition is also creating opportunities for local fire departments. Kurtz said the Glynn County and Brunswick fire departments are planning to train at the old administration building and the adjacent research lab. The layout of the buildings and the way they are situated offer the perfect urban simulation for firefighters, he said.

Pinova also donated a firefighting foam trailer it was building to bolster its on-site safety measures to the Glynn County Fire Department. That was an additional industrial firefighting contribution on top of the monetary donation the company made last year that helped local fire departments buy a similar trailer.

As the demolition plods forward, environmental remediation under a state Environmental Protection Division corrective action plan continues on the site to address toxaphene pollution left by Hercules, a former plant tenant. That plan includes more than 100 monitoring wells on and off the site that will remain even after demolition is complete.

Work at the Terry Creek outfall canal, a federal environmental Superfund site across U.S. 17 from Pinova, will also continue through and after the decommissioning process. Hercules is also responsible for the cleanup of that site.

When the plant closed in June 2023, there were 213 employees at Pinova, Kurtz said. All of them have either found new jobs, retired, or gone back to school to further their careers, he said.

All employees, no matter how long they had worked there, received a severance package and were given 60 days notice with pay before they were out of a job, as dictated by the worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act, or WARN Act.

“Every employee got something,” Kurtz said. “And most people had jobs before they even touched their severance.”

The steam stack that used to greet people at the end of the F.J. Torras Causeway coming off of St. Simons Island will come down soon, Kurtz said, marking a milestone in the demolition and the end of an era in Brunswick.

The large American flag that flies outside the plant at the corner of U.S. 17 and L Street is not coming down, Kurtz said. The guard shack, concrete slabs and one other small building will also remain on the site.

What will happen to the site after Pinova is out remains to be seen. The entire site, about 150-acres owned by Hercules and the rest by Pinova, is more than 300 acres. Once the buildings are gone, any further cleaning action will be assessed before next steps are taken, Kurtz said.

Company officials have promised transparency to the city and county commissions throughout the decommissioning and potential redevelopment process.

In February, company officials told the city commission that it supported the city’s intentions to redevelop the 300 acres into residential, commercial and potentially for offices for industries that offer high wages.

Local officials have said they think the site could be ready for reuse by 2025.



Michael Hall