

Plant has long history in Sumter

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BD, formerly known as Becton Dickinson, started manufacturing in Sumter in 1970, the same year the company first broke into the *Fortune* 500.

In the beginning, the Sumter plant had about 50 employees. Today the plant employs 740 people, with a payroll of about \$29 million, making it one of the largest employers in Sumter.

Yet BD's Sumter workers represent fewer than 3 percent of the company's total work force. About 25,000 people work for BD at 212 locations in 50 countries.

Thirty-four of those locations are in the United States.

After a Sumter County Development Board meeting Tuesday, council Chairwoman Naomi Sanders spoke to BD officials as they mingled with council members, board members and Central Carolina Economic Development Alliance members.

"Thank you for the opportunity to work with you, and thank you for being in Sumter," Sanders said.

The plant expansion is a welcome change of pace for Sumter County, which has heard more about plant closings than expansions recently. Federal Mogul announced in 2002 that it will close in 2006, affecting about 200 workers. In January, Bosch announced layoffs of 400 workers. Then, in June, Vaughan-Bassett Furniture Co. Inc., announced it would close shop, leaving 350 people without jobs.

However, Richard Cook, the vice president of worldwide operations for preanalytical systems, appeared upbeat about BD's future in Sumter. Cook, who spent 15 years in Sumter, told the group it was a "real pleasure to be back in Sumter."

"Sumter certainly has been a wonderful place for BD for the past 34 years," Cook said. "We're looking forward to at least 34 more years."

Maxwell Becton and Fairleigh Dickinson started BD in 1897 on a handshake. They sold their first item, a syringe, for \$2.50 in October 1897.

Last week the company reported quarterly revenues of \$1.26 billion for the quarter that ended June 30.

Not all has been smooth sailing, however. BD recently paid \$100 million to Retractable Technologies of Texas to settle a six-year-old antitrust lawsuit. Retractable Technologies alleged that it couldn't get hospitals to look at its products because of improper agreements between BD and hospitals' group purchasing organizations. Hospitals commonly negotiate through group purchasing organizations to get

discounts on expensive medical technology and supplies.

The lawsuit did not affect BD's expansion plans, Cook said.