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MasterTag expanding, adding jobs

An architectural rendering shows planned expansion of the MasterTag property on US HWY 31. The orange building is the new addition, while the yellow buildings are currently on the property, including the corporate headquarters on the right.



MONTAGUE TWP. — The 24,000 square-foot expansion of the MasterTag facilities on US HWY. 31 is ready to break ground.

MasterTag is a locally based international company that specializes in horticultural care tags and merchandising solutions.

The expansion is in response to growing demands on current facilities and the acquisition of new contracts.

"We took a hit in sales from the recession last year," explained MasterTag President Rick Hughes. "Instead of cutting employees and overhead, we smothered our customers with service ...They (customers) in turn came back this year and rewarded us with more business."

Rick and Holly Hughes, owners of MasterTag, said that the major factor for MasterTag's growth has been the dedication of their employees.

"Our employees did everything," added Holly Hughes. "It's the people that make a difference."

After a small competitor in Ohio closed their business last year, MasterTag was able to pick up most of the available contracts.

Those acquisitions had MasterTag employees putting in extra effort, according to the MasterTag president.

"There were times when we had three days to do 30 days of work for our new customers," said Rick Hughes. "That was on top of our normal operations."

The expansion of the MasterTag facilities is a necessary step to facilitate the growth the company is experiencing, Rick Hughes said.

"We are going to grow while we can," added Hughes, who expects to add 10 jobs from the expansion, with a possibility of more in the future.

WinBerg Construction, who built the corporate headquarters at the same location, is contracted to build the expansion.

"By hiring Winberg there is a broader outreach for job creation in the community," said WinBerg Construction President Brad VanBergen. "With local contractors and workers being a part of the project, jobs come with it."

Rick Hughes agreed with VanBergen's sentiment, saying "it's important to support local."

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John Keene
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jkeene@whitelakebeacon.com

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VanBergen was especially thankful for Rick and Holly Hughes' efforts to grow the community's economy.

"It means a lot to the community," said VanBergen. "This shows they are committed to our community and empowers us to work harder cause they're thankful."

The Hughes' weren't the only ones receiving praise.

"Brad reflects the high work and moral ethics of our community," said Rick Hughes. "It's great to be able to provide not only our own direct jobs, but also construction jobs by supporting local contractors through Brad."

Construction on the expansion should start next week, according to VanBergen, and is expected to continue through the summer with an August completion tentatively scheduled.

"Permits are in place and we've met with building officials," said VanBergen. "There will be one more meeting before we get going on a ground breaking."

The recession has also played a role in WinBerg Construction's efforts to keep costs down and procure top level workers.

"These times allow owners the ability to do more with less," explained VanBergen. "The numbers (quoted prices) on bids look good and schedules look good, so we can hire the best foreman on the trades we hire and the best crews."

The exterior facade will be similar in design to that of the company's corporate headquarters, but will blend design characteristics.

"Creative camouflage," was how VanBergen described the blending of the two buildings.

There has also been a "major" attempt to be environmentally friendly with the building's design.

"They will be harvesting natural light through window panels near the roof," said VanBergen. "They're also using native natural grass, which doesn't use any chemicals or excessive irrigation."

The environmental effort is also occurring inside the building with "an energy efficient light system, ran with a control package." The control package allows timers to be set for lights, as well as motion sensors and an override ability.

MasterTag's new building will primarily house manufacturing machinery and a shipping department.

The long term plan for the expansion is to move the "core of the manufacturing up here (the expansion) from Walsh Road (other MasterTag facility)," said the MasterTag president. "In time that will free up space on Walsh Road too."

The new equipment and added space will help the employees work more efficient, said Rick Hughes. The space is also required to keep the customers they have added and to entice new customers.

The Montague Township Board is supporting the expansion as well.

On March 7, the board approved an Industrial Facilities Exemption Certificate for the company's construction costs and equipment purchases associated with the expansion.

"Basically they are getting a 12-year, 50 percent tax abatement on the construction and machines," said Montague Township Supervisor Jeff King. "There was no opposition, we're happy to help out, anything to keep the local economy rolling."

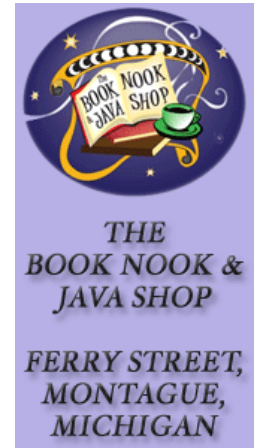
Schools will continue to receive 100 percent of their taxes, with the state making up the additional 50 percent, said King. "It's a complicated process the treasurer has to go through. I know because I was treasurer for eight years."

The Hughes' remain grateful of the their employees effort during their slow times and are excited about the future of MasterTag and it's employees.

"After construction we will pull back and look to grow as we can," said Rick Hughes. "But the real pay off is to hire more employees."

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