



Full speed ahead: Gioia Sails expansion fuels economic growth, development in Flagler

By Aaron London

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The New Jersey- based manufacturer of canvas sailing products intially moved some operations to Flagler County in 2013 to be closer to one of its major customers, Sea Ray Boats. But in the years since, the company has outgrown its initial location and made the decision to build a new facility in the city.

“This is a real success story for Flagler County,” said Helga van Eckert, executive director of the Flagler County Department of Economic Opportunity. “We recruited Gioia Sails a few years back and they came because they wanted to be in this environment.”

Van Eckert said while part of the reason the company chose Flagler County for its southern operations was the proximity to the Sea Ray Boats plant, they have added other customers.

“They expanded their market share and with Sea Ray closing they still have enough market to be growing,” she said.

While there were big smiles at the ribbon-cutting ceremony, it was not always a foregone conclusion the company would stay in Palm Coast.

“We almost lost them,” van Eckert said. “But they found the workforce they needed and the environment they felt was appropriate to their business and decided to build locally.”

The new 30,000-square-foot manufacturing space offers the company room to grow, said Pat Moynihan, Gioia Sails vice president.

“I look forward to the next five years because I see a lot of growth,” he said during the ribbon-cutting event. “By February or March, this building will be operational 24 hours a day.”

Moynihan recalled a conversation he had in 2009 with company owner Don Gioia. At that time, as the Great Recession was changing the economic landscape nationally, expanding the business “seemed like a pipe dream.”

With more than 58 employees today, including some just recently hired, the future looks far brighter today than it did nine years ago.

“We’re here and we’re moving up,” Moynihan said.

Speaking during last week’s ceremony, Gioia recalled the company’s founding more than 50 years ago in City Island in the Bronx. He said the shop was actually located on an old barge and he had a hot dog stand set up out front to raise extra money to pay the rent.

“Now look at it today,” he said outside the new facility. “It’s beautiful.”



Gioia said the experience of expanding the business in Flagler County was one of the easiest he's had running the company.

"This was actually the smoothest operation I've done in my life, and I've built a few buildings," he said.

Also speaking during last week's celebration, Palm Coast Mayor Milissa Holland said the new facility not only is a boon for the city's economy but demonstrates how cooperation between the city, the county and private industry can be successful.

"Today's ribbon-cutting ceremony reminds us of the value of our local partnerships," she said.

"It was a team effort between the city, county and community stakeholders to successfully facilitate the arrival of Gioia Sails in 2013 to our Flagler family."

Holland said in addition to creating jobs in the community, expansion projects like Gioia Sails also help diversify the economic base of the area.

"Successful business fuels growth and helps us invest in new infrastructure and amenities that sustain a robust quality of life that benefits the entire community," she said.