

Company officials celebrate rebound

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JONESBORO—Alan O'Connell is very proud of the turnaround at the Farr Air Pollution Control plant in Jonesboro.

Five years ago it looked as if the business was on the verge of going broke. They were down to 37 workers from a previous workforce of 350.

But Sweden-based parent company Camfil Farr Inc. decided to give the Jonesboro operation the resources necessary to resuscitate the business.

Today the company has grown back to about 120 workers and will see revenues top \$20 million, up from \$4 million in 2002, company officials said.

"We've put a lot of work in over the last five years and invested a lot," said O'Connell, chief executive officer of Camfil Farr. "It was not an easy decision for

us. It was not part of our core business. But we made a decision — it is going to be for the future. And after a period of consolidation we're growing again. It's quite a story. They should be real proud of themselves."

O'Connell was in Jonesboro earlier this month to take part in the company's international sales meeting. About 120 sales represen-



O'Connell



David Stout/The Sun

Sales representatives from Camfil Farr Inc. listen to a training seminar about industrial explosions in Farr Air Pollution Control at Jonesboro. The Sweden-based company held its international sales meeting in Jonesboro earlier this month.

REBOUND: Private firm with federal funding aids work of Camfil Farr

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tatives from 12 countries toured the Jonesboro plant and participated in a series of training seminars.

Farr APC manufactures industrial dust collection equipment which is used worldwide. The company was purchased in 2001 by Camfil Farr, the world's largest manufacturer of air filtration systems. The company, headquartered in Torosa, Sweden, has 22 production plants in the United States, Europe and Asia.

Mayor Doug Formon and Jonesboro Regional Chamber of Commerce CEO Mark Young welcomed the group to Jonesboro. The events

included a visit with Camfil Farr founder Jan Eric Larson, who now serves as executive chairman.

"It was exciting," Formon said. "There were people from every country you can think of. It's great to see what they have done there. They were just about gone. At one time they even rented out the front office to a bridal shop. Now here they are adding on to the plant."

Plant manager Jimmy Laird said he was excited about the visit and the chance to show the company what they have accomplished.

"It was great to get to show off our shop," Laird said. "I've gotten a good re-

sponse on how we do things. We have a great operation."

Finding assistance

Farr APC turned things around with the assistance of Arkansas Manufacturing Solutions, a private firm funded in part by the federal government. AMS works with manufacturers in all 50 states to help improve performance, productivity and profitability so U.S. companies can better compete in the global marketplace.

AMS helped Farr APC improve its work efficiency by 10 percent and cut its lead time in half from four to two weeks. The company went from producing five kinds

of filters to manufacturing more than 300 in Jonesboro, doubling its sales in 2006 and adding 20 new jobs. They will also undergo a 20,000-square-foot expansion at Jonesboro.

"This is quite a group of special people," O'Connell said. "The energy here is infectious, and you can see it here. I like coming to Jonesboro a lot."

O'Connell said he doesn't foresee things slowing down in Jonesboro anytime soon.

"We're here to grow," O'Connell said. "We're not in the business of going backward. And I think we're on a fairly steady basis."