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Cash for Christmas

Saturn Machine employees receive \$340K in bonuses

Carrie Dillard / Advocate Editor

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It was a very merry Christmas for employees of Saturn Machine and Welding Company. Forty-two individuals from the Sturgis business received production bonus checks in the amount of \$7,048 each. Altogether, owner Bill Baird doled out over \$340,000 in holiday and production bonuses this year.

Saturn was the recipient of a \$13 million contract from U.S. Steel Corporation, headquartered in Pittsburgh, Pa. "We were very fortunate through this bad economy to get a contract like that," Baird said. And though U.S. Steel continues to be one of Saturn's biggest customers, this contract was the largest they had ever won by far. "We don't know if we'll ever see this happen again," he continued, "but we may."

As an incentive for the tremendous amount of regular and overtime hours which lay ahead for his employees during this project, Baird promised this production bonus. "I told the crew I'd set \$300,000 aside to those guys who started at the beginning of these jobs," Baird stated. This was in addition to their regular wages.

"From the janitor to the president of the company," Baird promised, "everyone got the bonus."

Crewmembers who came on later in the project were offered a pro-rated cut of the bonus. All but four individuals received the full bonus check. Those workers received a pro-rated amount of \$6,700.

"A \$300,000 bonus split evenly between 42 people is probably unheard of," said Charles Lynch, company president. And truthfully, when Baird first promised his employees the production bonus nearly 18 months ago, some were skeptical.

Any skeptical employees were allowed to take a \$1 per hour raise instead. "They had three days to make a choice," Baird commented. Three individuals chose the raise.

Originally, employees weren't to see their bonus check until the job was entirely finished in March 2010. But times are tough, and as an employer, Baird wanted to ease those burdens. He was also proud of their work thus far. "They've done such a good job. The guys are ahead of schedule," he said.

The contract outlined the construction of four coke ovens to be delivered and installed over the course of one year. The job itself is well underway, says Lynch, and the biggest part is done. Saturn has completed two of the machines and will ship the third on January 4. The final piece of equipment will be delivered in March.

Lynch says he has a highly motivated and skilled workforce at Saturn. "Every

role here was

just as important (during this job),” Lynch said, “whether you were the head engineer, painting the machines or answering the phones.” This is the primary reason Baird divided the production bonus evenly among the workforce, regardless of title or seniority.

All 53 employees also received an extra week’s pay as a Christmas bonus. Baird says historically the company always offers a holiday bonus if possible and he remembers only one year in the past 20 years when he wasn’t able to do so. He paid a total of \$45,000 in holiday bonuses this year. This was the first year employees received a production bonus.

“I’ve always tried to take care of my employees. A lot of (work) places, you get a ham or nothing at all,” he stated. “For them to carry a good sum of money home on Christmas Eve... it makes me feel good.”

Employees received both their holiday and production bonuses on Christmas Eve.

Saturn Machine and Welding Company has been in business since 1965. They employ a total of 53 workers, a majority of who live in Union, Crittenden and Webster counties.

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