

# Acklin Stamping's comeback puts all workers back on job

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Acklin Stamping Division, on the verge of closing two years ago, has recalled all its laid-off workers, thanks to this summer's heat wave and union-negotiated work rule changes.

Ray Cox, general manager of Acklin Stamping, said 139 hourly workers now are employed at the plant at 1925 Nebraska Ave., a 21 percent increase from 115 employees in March. Acklin Stamping makes compressor housings for air conditioners and refrigerators.

## Heat kept business hot

"We started noticing the effects of the summer [heat wave] in June and July, when there was no downturn in business," Mr. Cox said. "We usually have a layoff of 12 to 15 people at the end of May or early June. Instead, we called back 13 people from mid-May to mid-June."

Normally, air-conditioner manufacturers complete most product assembly by June in time for summer sales, when demand is heaviest.

"The air-conditioner manufacturers had basically sold out of air conditioners," Mr. Cox said. "They have to replenish their inventories in 1989." That should keep employment at Acklin Stamping at its present level through 1989, he said.

Since February the company has been recalling several laid-off employees each month, helping to add

to overall hourly employment, which in 1986 and 1987 had averaged about 110 hourly employees. The company also employs about 40 salaried workers.

"In the mid-1980s we had not been profitable," he said. "Since then we have made improvements to be above the break-even point. This will help maintain a steady workforce."

The improvement is mainly the result of work rule changes approved in 1986 by members of the Acklin unit of UAW Local 12. The changes are included in a three-year labor contract.

Acklin Stamping threatened to close during a two-week strike, called by the United Auto Workers, that ended Feb. 22, 1986. "There were no wage concessions," Mr. Cox said of the settlement, "but there were changes in work rule efficiencies."

The modifications give the company more freedom to assign employees to different jobs. The number of job classifications was reduced from 35 to 13, he said.

Having too many job classifications worked a hardship on the company, he said. The old system allowed some workers to be idle for several hours at the plant because they had finished their specific tasks; job classifications prevented those employees from doing other work they were capable of performing.

## New work being sought

"By virtue of those changes and management asking management and hourly people to put forth a greater effort, we have reduced costs and have been able to add jobs," Mr. Cox said.

Last year the company manufactured 2.5 million compressor housing sets. That number is expected to reach 3 million this year, he said.

Acklin wants to find new stamping work beyond what it supplies for Tecumseh Products, he said.

"We are looking for work from other companies that use compressors, or any others that use stamping that require deep-draw stamping expertise," Mr. Cox said.

Since the new labor agreement, Acklin Stamping has picked up additional business from Tecumseh Products Co., which owns Acklin Stamping. Acklin set up a new production line to make muffler parts for a compressor.

## Cheaper dollar helps sales

Improved sales of existing parts made by Acklin for Tecumseh also has bought an upturn in Acklin business. The drop in the value of the dollar in relation to foreign currencies help obtain sales, he said.

The company is selling more air conditioners in foreign markets, and air-conditioner parts makers have kept work in the United States rather than transferring production offshore.