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Tuesday, February 6, 2007

Rochester firm gets OK to expand

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ROCHESTER — When the Boeing 787 Dreamliner flies into Beijing for the Olympics on Aug. 8, 2008, on board will be a "critical primary structure" manufactured locally by Albany Engineered Composites.

It would not have been possible without the Planning Board's approval Monday night of Albany's plans to double its manufacturing space at 112 Airport Drive.

The board unanimously approved the plan, as hoped by the city administration, which in preceding weeks helped the company ensure a rare one-night approval for the large-scale project. The company envisioned the expansion in 1999, when the first 60,000 square feet of the pre-engineered building was built, so grading, drainage and wetlands issues already have



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been resolved.

The company plans to knock down a wall in the existing manufacturing facility so when the addition is complete, above the visitor's parking area, it will look like one building. The expansion also calls for a brick veneer second floor, atop the office building fronting the manufacturing space.

Albany officials said there will be "net additions" of between 25 and 50 workers by 2009, bringing total local employment to around 150. The new jobs will be for engineers, administration and accounting, and machine operators, particularly on second and third shifts.

Though the project will make room for greater machine-automated operations, there will "still be a lot of things that could require human intervention," said Don Rose, plant manager.

The project is being spurred by two things: Boeing's plans for the Dreamliner, a twin-aisle commercial aircraft billed by the company as a more efficient and environmentally-friendly jetliner; and production of a fan blade for a new generation of single-aisle planes to replace the Airbus A320 and Boeing 737.

A Boeing spokeswoman confirmed the Dreamliner will be delivered between May 2008 and early 2009, with six going to Chinese carriers before the Olympics.

"They will get a 787 in their fleet in time to support the Olympics," Yvonne Leach, of Boeing, said Monday.

Albany has two other production facilities in the United States. The firm is part of the larger century-old and Albany, N.Y.-headquartered Albany International Corp.

Rochester-based Albany hopes to begin the estimated five-month construction period in March. This works within Boeing's time frame of having the Dreamliner's first flight take place in August, followed by a half year of tests.

Albany officials could not reveal what "critical primary structure" they will be creating for the Dreamliner, but signaled it will be part of the air frame.

Both components will be taking advantage of Albany's 3-D weaving and net-shaped pre-form technology, an elaborate process currently put to use for military aircraft.



Albany Engineered composites technician Susan West works a 3-D weaving machine at the Rochester facility Monday. (John Huff/Staff photographer)

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Compared with two-dimensional weaving currently used by the company, 3-D allows a variety of length, thickness and width. It is also more precise, more damage and fatigue resistant, lighter weight, and costs less, Rose explained at the site before Monday's meeting.

Up to eight Jacquard weaving machines will fill the new space, with each controlling 8,500 yellow warp yarns and taking up 2,000 square feet of space.
