

Robotics firm's move to Shelby Township a 'win-win' situation

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By SEAN DELANEY

Kuka Robotics, one of the world's largest robot manufacturers, recently agreed to make Shelby Township the home of their new North American headquarters. The company will move into this 80,000 square-foot building in the Shelby Parkway industrial subdivision north of 23 Mile Road, west of Schoenherr. The building was constructed in 2001, but never occupied.

Kuka Robotics, one of the world's largest robot manufacturers, recently agreed to make Shelby Township the home of its new North American headquarters.

"We can help make the world aware of Shelby Township," said Stuart Shepherd, president of the U.S. division of Kuka Robotics while addressing the Shelby Township Board of Trustees at the July 19 meeting.

According to Shepherd, the company will move into a vacant 80,000-square-foot building in the Shelby Parkway industrial subdivision north of 23 Mile Road, west of Schoenherr Road. The building was constructed in 2001, but never occupied.

"While the outside appears to be complete, it is actually not finished on the inside," said Shelby Township Supervisor Richard Stathakis. "It has dirt floors, no heating and no plumbing."

James Cooper, vice president of sales and marketing for Kuka, said the company leased the building and will gradually move operations and approximately 68 employees to Shelby Township. Full occupancy is expected by October or November, he said.

In order for Kuka Robotics to take over the building, the Board of Trustees also had to approve a request by the building's owner, GS Rousslin LLC, to establish an industrial development district at 51870 Shelby Parkway.

"The industrial development district is designed specifically for Kuka Robotics and the facility they're going to be operating," said James Ahee, senior economic development specialist for Macomb County. "They're looking for a facility that can really help them grow in the future. By moving into a custom facility they can design themselves, they can address their specific needs."

According to company officials, Kuka currently shares a building on Key Drive in Clinton Township with one of its subsidiaries, but both firms have outgrown that facility.

"We've been looking at different places throughout the country to relocate," Shepherd said. "Only 5 percent of our business comes from Michigan. We pursued other states and other states pursued us. We settled on Michigan based on the incentives and other active business development work we've been engaged in with the state, county and now Shelby Township."

As incentive for the company to move its headquarters to Shelby Township, the Board of Trustees recently agreed to approve Kuka Robotics' request for a 5-year tax abatement.

"These tax abatements are one of the things we can do at the local level to help move the economy forward," Ahee said.

The board agreed, and Stathakis thanked Kuka Robotics for making an investment in Shelby Township.

"Though the board cannot create jobs, we can and we must continue our quest to promote job creation, and this might be a good opportunity," he said.

Founded in 1898 in Germany, Kuka Robotics is a worldwide company with more than 35 subsidiaries scattered around the globe. In addition to its Clinton Township home, Kuka operates in Sterling Heights, Fenton and Saginaw. Its robotics operations also include work on the Jeep Wrangler in Toledo, Ohio.

"We are the No. 1 supplier of robotics for the carbon fiber aircraft industry," Shepherd said. "We also provide motion technologies for very large and awkward things to move, such as aircraft fuselage, electric motors and even robots. We're also a major supplier of automation for the solar industry and have been extremely successful in North America. Even the Pepsi you drink was probably handled by a Kuka robot."

He said the company plans to invest at least \$645,000 in its new headquarters in Shelby Township, plus an additional \$800,000 worth of capital equipment and other improvements during the next four or five years.

"This is a not a short-term, one-shot deal," Shepherd said. "This is an investment by our company."

According to Ahee, Kuka Robotics will continue to pay personal property taxes on the machinery it already has, but the tax breaks will cover the \$2.45 million investment on the new equipment it plans to bring to the Shelby Township facility.

"It's a win-win situation for everybody," Ahee said. "It's a win for the people who are going to continue to work at Kuka Robotics, plus the new people they're going to hire here. It's a win for the company because they get brand new facilities that will help them remain competitive and continue to grow. It's a win for Shelby Township because they get a new corporate citizen and (someone to) occupy one of the buildings that has been sitting there empty for almost 10 years now. It's also a win for Macomb County and the state because we get to keep an advanced manufacturing company in Michigan."