

Layoffs hit most sectors of Louisiana, more threatened The Associated Press State & Local Wire November 16, 2000, Thursday, BC cycle

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The Associated Press State & Local Wire

November 16, 2000, Thursday, BC cycle

## Layoffs hit most sectors of Louisiana, more threatened

**BYLINE:** By ALAN SAYRE, AP Business Writer

**SECTION:** Business News; State and Regional

**LENGTH:** 778 words

Here, there and almost everywhere across Louisiana, hundreds of workers have been handed their pink slips in recent weeks and more could easily find themselves on the chopping block in the next few months.

The biggest payroll cut is threatened by Harrah's New Orleans Casino, where about 3,000 employees would join the jobless ranks if the casino carries out its threat to close next March unless it gets a sizable tax cut from the state.

But for other workers, unemployment became harsh reality recently:

- The sudden closure of Port Barre Apparel on Nov. 10 pitched out 95 workers, many of whom were among the 400 workers fired in the town during Fruit of the Loom's cutbacks in Louisiana, which ended more than 4,000 jobs three years ago.

Port Barre Apparel could not even cover its paychecks, warning they would probably bounce. The company blamed its shutdown on a major client that did not pay its bill and faulty raw materials that delayed production for another major client.

- The wood products industry, a staple in northern Louisiana, has been hit by a glut for lumber and wood products, as well as a changing marketplace.

Willamette Industries said its plywood plant in Ruston will close Jan. 15, ending the jobs of 246 workers. The company said the plant, which makes plywood for underlayment and sheathing, is no longer competitive.

Louisiana-Pacific Corp. has closed its Bernice mill, which employs 70 people, and **Hunt Forest Products** shuttered its Castro plant, putting 85 people out of work.

- Bayou Steel Corp. temporarily laid off 100 workers at its LaPlace mill, blaming a glut of "cheap foreign products" in the domestic steel market. The company began letting vacancies go unfilled in June, but that wasn't enough to avoid the layoffs, which are expected to last five to six months.

- Blue-collar workers aren't the only ones to be sent packing. In late September, New Orleans-based Freeport McMoRan Copper & Gold Inc., which has most of its operations overseas, chopped 22 of its 34 headquarters jobs.

- About 1,100 workers at a Lucent Technologies manufacturing plant in Shreveport might have been out by now, except for a National Labor Relations Board complaint that the company withheld information from the plant's union about plans to outsource its work. A hearing is scheduled for early next year.

Entergy Corp., which plans to merge in about a year with Florida-based FPL Group Inc. to form one of the nation's largest utilities, said Tuesday that 1,271 jobs would be cut from a merged work force of about 24,000.

The reductions will affect the merged corporation's new headquarters in Juno Beach, Fla., and its regulated utilities management staff, which is supposed to be located in New Orleans. According to a filing with public utility regulators in Arkansas, each eliminated job carries an average salary of \$80,000, including benefits.

Unlike the casino jobs, linked to a potential political fight in the Legislature, most of the job losses are due to two factors: market conditions for a product and eliminating duplication when two companies come together.

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Jobs lost due to markets often come back. But consolidations are another matter and likely will continue to be lost in Louisiana. Among the headquarters lost in recent years through acquisitions are Louisiana Land & Exploration, K&B Drugs and First Commerce Corp.

"Ninety-nine out of 100 times, the new headquarters will be in city of the stronger of the two companies," said University of New Orleans economist Timothy Ryan. "Given our economy, we've never have managed to have the stronger of the two companies."

However, manufacturing is not necessarily in bad shape. A report issued in October by a group of university economists said Louisiana should add 6,100 manufacturing jobs over the next two years, spurred by the expansion of the General Motors plant in Shreveport. High oil prices also should spur employment in fabricated metals, machinery and shipbuilding, the report said.

Loren Scott, an economist at Louisiana State University, said the two largest manufacturing concerns in the state - chemicals and petroleum refining - are not as vulnerable to market cycles.

"The chemical industry makes a number of things that are not cyclical. And there's always a steady demand for gasoline," Scott said.

The largest block of jobs at stake, for the immediate future, appears to be with the New Orleans casino.

"It's a bad situation," said Sen. Donald Cravins, D-Arnaudville and chairman of the Senate oversight committee on gambling legislation. "Just to say you're going to shave 3,000 jobs is a tough sell."

**LOAD-DATE:** November 21, 2000

**LANGUAGE:** ENGLISH

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Bernice mill's shutdown will cost 70 jobs The Associated Press State & Local Wire November 3, 2000, Friday, BC cycle

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November 12, 2000, Sunday, BC cycle

## Lumber plant closing hits village hard

**SECTION:** Business News; State and Regional

**LENGTH:** 675 words

**DATELINE:** CASTOR, La.

Logs are the economic life of this small Bienville Parish community.

But forestry is faltering, from Northwest Louisiana to the Pacific Northwest. Competition is cutting prices, dry summer weather led to excess supplies and customer demand has fallen.

Lumber mills are closing. For many communities, a way of life is ending.

Castor, founded a century ago, is just now recovering from a tornado that hammered the village on Easter.

On Nov. 1, residents learned that **Hunt Forest Products** will close the lumber mill there at the end of the year. All 85 workers, from plant maintenance to the plant manager, will lose their jobs. Another 30 or so workers on four logging crews also are losing work.

"Its devastating news for a little community like this. Some people will just cash in and retire," said Charles Harper, owner of The General Store and a local resident for 30 years.

"But I don't think it will cause the town to fold up. We survived the tornado - we can survive this," Harper said.

In the early 1900s, Castor was a farm and railroad town. As it and other towns grew, the need for lumber grew. Timber became a thriving industry. The mill now owned by Hunt opened in 1933.

Not so long ago, it ran two shifts and employed about 200 workers. But foreign imports started cutting into the U.S. market. Demand dropped. Prices fell. Business dropped like leaves on a windy autumn day.

Lumber mills started closing. Louisiana forestry fell from a \$5.4 billion industry in 1998 to \$4.2 billion last year.

The news that Hunt would close the Castor mill hit the town as hard as last spring's tornado.

"It was like a death. People are hurting," said Joseph Nash, 66, a molder operator who has worked at the plant for 30 years.

His wife, Mary, has worked at the mill for 20 years.

"You can't be yourself when you're looking at losing all your income. Our bills will still be coming. How are we going to pay all that?" she said. "I'm believing in God for a miracle."

She is even more worried about the effect on the entire village.

"There's a lot more to this mill than just a job," she said. "Everybody is saying, 'What next? How long will the stores stay open?' If the mill doesn't run, it can't support the schools and the community."

The village also will lose taxes paid by the mill.

Plant manager Bobby Black said he had thought Hunt might just close the mill for a while. "But the industry is down and that was out of our control. It's going to be a bad Christmas and not a very happy new year."

At an intersection where four-way stop signs control the pickup trucks and logging trucks, Harold Byrd is rebuilding a convenience store and gas station reduced to rubble on Easter.

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"I don't think it will make or break the community. People will find other jobs out of town. It will hurt my morning business, but there's still a lot of traffic through here," he said. "I won't let it dampen my spirits. I rode out the tornado - I can ride this out."

Myrt Myrick, who owns a former florist shop where a restaurant will soon open, agrees: "We can't roll over and play dead because the mill is closing. We are going full steam ahead."

But Myrick doesn't downplay the problems it will cause. "I've been here since 1950 and Castor will not be the same without the mill. It's going to hurt our community. Timber provides income for so many people. I pray the Lord will see us through."

Log yard supervisor Sam Marble has worked in timber all his life, the past two years at the Castor mill. Now he's considering another line of work.

"Some people think Castor will become a ghost town. Who knows? It's been a rough year here. But we're not the first community to go through this," he said.

George Jacob, who works for five area water systems, said most people will probably keep their homes in the Castor area but work in Shreveport or other cities.

"This can't help but be painful, but people will still live here. I'm not leaving. I'm here for better or worse," he said. "This is home."

**LOAD-DATE:** November 13, 2000

**LANGUAGE:** ENGLISH

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## **Bernice mill's shutdown will cost 70 jobs**

**SECTION:** Business News; State and Regional

**LENGTH:** 227 words

**DATELINE:** BERNICE, La.

A glut in the market for lumber and wood products will close the Louisiana-Pacific Corp. Bernice mill, which employs 70 people.

The announcement follows an announcement Wednesday that Ruston-based **Hunt Forest Products** that it will close its Castor plant in southern Bienville Parish, putting 85 people out of work.

Louisiana-Pacific said its mill in Union Parish will remain open about two weeks while raw products are processed or shipped to other plants.

Louisiana-Pacific said it would pay workers through December, along with providing a severance package. Company spokesman Rick Barrilleaux said market conditions also sank the plant, which the company has operated since 1985, and a plywood facility in New Waverly, Texas.

"There's more wood on the market than we have demand for it," he said.

Forests cover almost half of the state's land. But trees from Canada, South America and other markets have cut into profits. The total economic impact of forestry and forest products fell to \$4.2 billion in 1999, down from \$5.4 billion in 1998.

Willamette Industries recently said its plywood plant in Ruston also will close in January due to shrinking markets for plywood products, costing 246 more jobs.

International Paper Co. also is closing its plant in Camden, Ark., where about 580 workers will find themselves without jobs.

**LOAD-DATE:** November 4, 2000

**LANGUAGE:** ENGLISH

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Bienville closure dims Christmas for 85 The Associated Press State & Local Wire November 2, 2000, Thursday, BC cycle

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November 2, 2000, Thursday, BC cycle

## **Bienville closure dims Christmas for 85**

**SECTION:** Business News; State and Regional

**LENGTH:** 135 words

**DATELINE:** RUSTON, La.

Ruston-based **Hunt Forest Products** will close its Castor facility in southern Bienville Parish effective Dec. 31, putting 85 people out of work.

The plant makes a full array of Southern Yellow Pine lumber products.

"We hate we had to do this," Hunt's Human Resources Manager George Keyes said Wednesday. "We take it kind of personal."

The Castor facility is the first plant Hunt's had to shut down. Company President D.J. Young said the closure is the "unfortunate result of an oversupply of lumber that has caused prices to drastically deteriorate."

Keyes blamed the influx of foreign timber with contributing to the price decline. Worsening market conditions forced the plant to eliminate one of its two shifts about a year ago. Hunt bought the Castor mill in 1992 from Martin Timber Company.

**LOAD-DATE:** November 3, 2000

**LANGUAGE:** ENGLISH

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Two Louisiana lumber plants shutting down The Associated Press State & Local Wire November 2, 2000, Thursday, BC cycle

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November 2, 2000, Thursday, BC cycle

## Two Louisiana lumber plants shutting down

**BYLINE:** By The Associated Press

**SECTION:** Business News; State and Regional

**LENGTH:** 269 words

A market glut for lumber and wood products will result in the closing of two Louisiana plants that employ a total of 155 people.

Louisiana-Pacific Corp. is shutting its Bernice mill, which employs 70 people, while Ruston-based **Hunt Forest Products** will close its Castor plant in southern Bienville Parish, putting another 85 people out of work.

Both closures were announced Wednesday.

Louisiana-Pacific said its mill will remain open about two weeks while raw products are either processed or shipped to other plants. The Castor plant, which makes Southern Yellow Pine lumber products, will close Dec. 31.

Last month, Willamette Industries said it would close a plywood plant near Ruston on Jan. 15, putting 246 people out of work.

"We hate we had to do this," said George Keyes, personnel manager for **Hunt Forest Products**. "We take it kind of personal."

The plant is the first that Hunt has shut down. Company president D.J. Young said the closure is the "unfortunate result of an oversupply of lumber that has caused prices to drastically deteriorate."

Keyes blamed an influx of foreign timber for the market glut and a sharp price decline. Hunt bought the mill in 1922 from Martin Timber Co. and eliminated one of its two shifts about a year ago.

Louisiana-Pacific said it would pay workers through December, along with providing a severance package. Company spokesman Rick Barrilleaux said market conditions also sank the plant, which they've operated since 1985, and a plywood facility in New Waverly, Texas.

"There's more wood on the market than we have demand for it," he said.

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