PCA

➤ continued from A1

The Journal. "Obviously we want the packaging side of the business, but we also concluded, through a long due diligence effort that was stretched out over a good part of the year, that we can make the fine paper side of this business successful also. After spending time in the mills, I'm even more convinced that this is a great decision and a great opportunity for us and the folks out in the mill."

Kowlzan said PCA and its management team know how to run mills. "And we believe we can bring our operating expertise to bear making bleached fine paper. Part of that is operating efficiencies and how well you run day-to-day and quality," he said.

Already, PCA is making investments into the local mill, he said. In the short term, he said PCA wants to make sure that the employees have the tools to do jobs everyday. But he also said investments in new technology are being made.

"We're talking some millions of dollars a year of a re-infusion immediately into just new technology to enhance the efficiencies throughout the mill and these are literally hundreds of projects that we can start acting upon that are low risk and high reward, high return opportunities to enhance the efficiency and the quality of the product."

As an example, he said providing lubrication and vibration-detection technology to operators would assist in keeping machines operating more efficiently more of the time, rather than waiting for problems and bringing in maintenance workers with complex equipment.

"From all the lubrication technology and vibration understanding, we can improve the process and improve significantly the reliability of the process, which in turn improves the cost side of the equation," he said. "And then you're getting more quality product available for the customers. On these big high-speed machines, if you can prevent a failure, and understand you have an issue developing and you have a planned outage to address it or address it on the next downtime outage — it's a huge opportunity."

Kowlzan said many people working at PCA now started out in the white paper side of the business. Kowlzan spent 15 years at International Paper Company, where he held a series of operational and managerial positions.

"Those of us that made the decision to go forward with this deal arrived at that decision with a much high comfort level because of our backgrounds," he said."That allowed us to make the decision that we believe we could make this a success."

Kowlzan said PCA takes pride to "minimize bureaucratic behavior.... We have minimal layers within the organization, and that is something that is uniquely different than a lot of the big paper companies. We have a very close first-hand understanding of where the opportunities lie and how to leverage those opportunities."

PCA deals with unions well, Kowlzan said. "If you talk to the primary unions, the Steelworkers and Machinists unions, we already have a recognized credibility with the internationals. Our reputation and our actions speak for themselves in how we deal with the unions and go about our day-to day interactions."

Kowlzan said he looks forward to cooperation and understanding on regulatory matters — local, state and federal: "That we all play a part in and we're all business partners. No one of us can do it ourselves. We all have to work together and we all have the same interests in mind and that's that we're all successful together or we fail together."

Kowlzan said forest certification is important for the environment, sustainability and PCA customers. He is a member of the board of directors of the American Forest & Paper Association, a leader in the forest certification industry.

"Everything in our daily life revolves around sustainability and minimum impact on the environment," he said. "Certified wood, that whole effort — there's a big value in that you are assuring that your raw materials sources are being supplied in an responsible manner. It's important to our customer base and it's important to us as a manufacturer and steward of the regional environment."

Kowlzan said PCA believes it can "improve the economic well-being of the mill and hence the community. We see through reasonable investments back into the assets, low risk, minimal capital that we can significantly improve this. And we know that works. I am excited about working with the mill, the community and make this a better facility and have it achieve all the potential it can and should achieve.

And Kowlzan said PCA knows humans are an important asset.

"People make the difference," he said. "We understand you can have the best technology, but if you don't have a motivated workforce and workforce that believes in you, you will not be successful. We live that everyday."

Kowlzan said he sees the pride the local workers have in the mill and believes they and the community will benefit from PCA's ownership of the mill.

"We truly have a much stronger financial position and will be a much more capable company," he said. "So the Boise brand name stays on. It's just part of the bigger, stronger Packaging Corporation of America and so there is a paper side to that and a corrugated container board side to that. It gives us a much more capable company. And I think everyone should be proud of that."

For a man who started his first job at age 14, he pledges a commitment to bringing the mill success.

"My own personal commitment is to helping them get better at what we do and that's making office paper and off-set printing papers and making a good profit doing that and that allows us to take care of our shareholders and employees and keep our balance sheet under control and satisfy all the stakeholders and have something we're all proud of. I take that very seriously. And you have my personal commitment that we do this in a matter that we are responsible."

JAIL

➤ continued from A1

The addition of two staff would add about $100,000 because part-time staff would have been cut.

"There are good reasons to do it, but for the county it's a huge expense," she said, adding that no options to adding staff were fully explored. Instead, she said, commissioners saw adding one staff member as a compromise.

Commissioner Wade Pavleck said he was reluctant to support adding staff because of the costs to taxpayers.

"But the bigger issue is enlarging the county workforce when our population is on the decline and the economy is in free fall."

He said the county has been forced to add two staff to the Community Services Department to manage the changes brought by the Affordable Care Act. In addition, he said it appears that the Falls International Airport, jointly owned by the county and International Falls, may be required to hire armed, licensed officers for security.

"It concerns me," he said of increasing staff numbers. "It's all a recipe for big tax increases in the future — that's why I have been very cautious and reluctant to add unless we have looked at all other options."

And he said those options haven't been considered. City officials, he said, have said they are willing to discuss using police officers to help in the jail and dispatch center and U.S. Border Protection officials have said they are willing to work with the county in meeting its security needs.

Pavleck said he's been willing to support one-time technology improvement costs in the Sheriff's Department that make people safer, but he said the ongoing costs of adding employees is concerning.

FOOD SHELF

➤ continued from A1

This year, however, it almost wasn't in the nonprofit organization's budget to supply them.

"I felt bad telling clients who called asking about vouchers that we weren't going to be able to give them out this year," Rognerud said. "(Vouchers) cost us about $3,000 per year, and we just couldn't afford it this year."

Then came a donation from a new business in town.

Miner's County Market collected donations from customers through a Dash for Cash promotion it ran from mid-July to mid-October. Last week, the grocery store presented the food shelf with $5,490 — all donated by County Market customers who participated in the program.

"That's a huge number," Rognerud said of the donation. "It will help with the 350 more vouchers we expect to see go out the door."

Joe Truman, manager of the local store, said County Market is proud to be able to help out the Falls Hunger Coalition and appreciated the store's customers who chose to donate their Dash for Cash winnings to help those in need.

With the unexpected money, Rognerud said the Falls Hunger Coalition will again be able to supply the "much-need and much-appreciated" vouchers.

"We're getting a little bit of a late start, but nonetheless, we're able to do it," she said. "With the vouchers, families of two or more can buy a 10- to 12-pound turkey from County Market or Stewart's Super One Foods. What better way to spend this money from the grocery store back at our local grocery stores. It's a blessing in disguise."

Donations on the rise

In addition to the Dash for Cash funding, Rognerud said both the local County Market and Super One stores continue to support the food shelf through food donations.

She said before County Market came to the community, Super Valu supplied the food shelf with a few gallons of milk and dairy products a few times each week. When County Market took over in May, Rognerud said she approached store managers to work out a similar agreement.

"Not only did (donations) continue, they expanded," she said. "We started receiving crates of bread...We couldn't even get rid of it fast enough. Our clients are so happy."

Because the International Falls store is "at the end of the road" for the distribution truck, Rognerud said overflow is given to the food shelf.

The grocery stores also provide other products to benefit food shelf clients, she said.

"Both grocery stores are very giving," she said. "We are able to utilize different things from each one. It's amazing how giving they are...Dave at Super One has never turned us down. We are so grateful and our families are so grateful."

Helping out

Rognerud said the holiday spirit "is definitely felt" by several other individual and group donations pouring in from the community.

"We just had a new fundraiser that we've never done before," she said.

Local entertainers Naomi Woods and Darcy Sullivan hosted "A Wine, Cheese and Candlelit Evening," Nov. 2 at the Ranier Community Building and donated all the proceeds raised to the food shelf.

"Everything was 100 percent donated," Rognerud said of the wine and food for the event. "I don't know where the idea to raise funds for us came from, but they raised $1,474 and it was just an incredible evening. We will definitely be having another event just like this."

Halloween brought in about 400 pounds of food from Falls High Student Council members and local Girl Scouts who went trick-or-treating for the food shelf. Student council collected 216 pounds of food and the Girl Scouts gathered 202 pounds.

On top of food donations, last month Falls Hunger Coalition received a $5,000 grant from Minnesota Power.

Peggy Hanson, Minnesota Power Foundation director, said the grant reflects Minnesota Power's commitment to the communities it serves.

But in a time of need, the organization still needs more.

Thursday, anyone looking to make a donation to the food shelf can do so during Give to the Max Day – The Great Minnesota Give Together.

"It's an online giving day that happens throughout the state," Rognerud said. "Nonprofits that are registered with givemn.org compete to see which organization can bring in the most online donations."

The day offers a friendly competition to see which nonprofit can bring in the most money. Winning organizations receive a certain percentage of funding on top of what was donated. Rognerud said while Falls Hunger Coalition is competing against much larger organizations, she is confident the International Falls community can make a difference.

"It is a very safe and secure site to donate to," she added. "Anyone can donate to us from 12:01 a.m. Nov. 14 to 11:59 p.m."

The site will also accept scheduled donations through Wednesday. For more information, visit www.givemn.org and search 'Falls Hunger Coalition.'

"This community is awesome," Rognerud said of the support given to the food shelf. "Our director, Nancy (Anderson) always says, 'We're in a business that we would like to put ourselves out of business, but that will never happen.' There will always be people who need our services...We aren't here to band-aid, we're here to help our clients reach self sufficiency."

The Falls Hunger Coalition has scheduled client-service hours from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Tuesdays and from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays.

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