

BUSINESS

9 TO 5

The Journal welcomes ideas for stories about people in our community who are starting a business or changing an old one.
Call the Journal at 285-7411

National shopping event promotes local business

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

Once you've eaten all the turkey you can on Thanksgiving and gotten all the Black Friday deals the following day, remember to check out locally-owned stores on Small Business Saturday.

Saturday, Nov. 29, is Small Business Saturday nationwide, and International Falls Area Chamber of Commerce president Faye Whitbeck said the local chamber strongly supports the campaign, which holds significant meaning for the area.

"Particularly now, in the course of the community's 'Voyage Forward,' encouraging each other to do our holiday shopping locally is being true to what it means to be a community steward," Whitbeck said in a release. "The Small Business Saturday current slogan 'When you shop small, it can lead to big things' is a message

Borderland should take to heart."

Initiated by American Express and supported by the U.S. Small Business Administration, the movement to support small, local businesses is in its fifth year.

The first-ever Small Business Saturday was held in 2010 on the Saturday after Thanksgiving. According to a release, it encouraged people across the country to support their community's small businesses, and it started a holiday shopping tradition.

For every \$100 spent in a community, \$68 of it goes right back into that community, Whitbeck said.

"When you shop at our local businesses, you boost the survival of all the things that make our community a great place to live," Whitbeck said. "The money you spend here stays here. Cities that have been successful in overcoming economic setbacks really understand that."

Big Falls business to shut its doors

BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer

Once its inventory runs out, possibly in January, Page & Hill Forest Products in Big Falls will close its doors for good.

Owner Rich Hufnagle said the timing of the closure isn't finalized yet, and is reliant on when the company's inventory will be used up. However, he said he's already notified his 22 employees of the impending closure.

The reason for the closure, Hufnagle said, is a soil contamination issue from a previous wood treatment plant which started in 1947. The company has worked on cleaning up the contamination issue for many years but the cost finally became too great, he said.

"We've been working on it for many years, and it's been a drain on the finances," Hufnagle said. "Lately it's been more intense, and I figured it was time to get out before we don't have the money to get out."

While it's hard to pinpoint the exact cause of the contamination, Hufnagle said a 1958 fire which caused some tanks to rupture probably played a large part in the contamination. Over the years, the company has worked with



STAFF PHOTO BY EMILY GEDDE

Page & Hill Forest Products will shut its doors permanently when it uses up its inventory, owner Rich Hufnagle said.

the other parties responsible for the cleanup, including Burlington Northern Railroad, which previously owned the site, and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

Discussions between the involved parties had been going on for years, Hufnagle said, and reached a stalemate. An agreement on continued cleanup couldn't be reached.

After the shutdown, Hufnagle said the company will dismantle the equipment, but won't be able to sell the site due to the contamination issue.

He wouldn't want to go back into the wood treatment business again, he

said, due to the growing costs and oversight.

"There's too much regulation, that's what killed it in the end," Hufnagle said. "We knew we kept facing the costs of cleanup, and they just became overbearing."

According to the company's website, the Big Falls yard and treatment plant opened in late 1946, and the Hufnagle family took over ownership of the company in 1968. The cause of the closure is an unfortunate situation, Hufnagle said.

"It's really a shame it had to happen," Hufnagle said. "It's not the way I'd planned to retire."

Koochiching Economic

Development Authority Director Paul Nevanen said the impact of Big Falls losing its largest employer can't be understated.

"They're a long-time employer who provided good jobs, and they've been an institution down there," Nevanen said. "It's very alarming news, and the bottom line is it's losing jobs."

County Commissioner Wayne Skoe represents Big Falls, and he said the board has contacted Hufnagle about trying to find a solution to keep the business open, but the circumstances are beyond the county's control. Page & Hill was the last major employer in Big Falls, he said.

"The effect is going to be pretty dramatic," Skoe said. "There's a few smaller employers, but that's pretty much the end of it. If people aren't working there, they're not spending their dollars there, so it hurts the whole community."

According to the company's website, Page & Hill, Inc. was founded more than 100 years ago as a utility pole supplier with facilities in several northern states and British Columbia. With the ownership change in 1968, the product line was diversified and consolidated to the Big Falls location as Page & Hill Forest Products, Inc.

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in
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