

Remains of local GE plant sold off

Ex-employees find once-lively building 'strange and empty'

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KERNSTOWN- One word seemed to best describe the General Electric Consumer & Industrial's Winchester Lamp Plant's status Wednesday: empty.

The equipment that once churned out millions of light bulbs each day mostly had been removed, shipped off to other plants or sold for scrap. Most of the remnants were auctioned off Wednesday, an event attended by more than 200 people as well as hundreds of bidders reportedly following on a simultaneous webcast.

Among those in attendance were some of the thousands of employees who were the heart and soul of the plant during its 35-year run that ended Sept. 23. The building they walked into Wednesday was very different from the one they walked out of six months ago.

"Strange and empty," said Tim Lineweaver of Winchester, who worked at the plant for 31 years. "I never knew this building was this big. It just seems so much bigger."

Lineweaver, who retired when he left GE, planned to bid on cabinets and other miscellaneous items. While waiting for the lots he wanted to come up for bid, he spent time catching up with some former co-workers, including Kevin Loudan of Stephens City.

"I was anxious to get back in and see what it looked like," said Loudan, who worked at the plant for more than 26 years and is now the facilities manager at Victory Church. "When I saw it was empty, it was kind of disappointing."

"To know that when I was working we made over two-and-a-half million light bulbs a day at one time and now there's nothing coming out of it is upsetting."

Loudan's sentiments weren't just worn on his sleeves, they *were* his sleeves. He wore a black T-shirt which read on its back:

R.I.P.

Winchester Lamp Plant

1975-2010

The shirts, he said, were made by third-shift workers last year when GE's head of North American lighting came to Winchester to salute them for hitting production, quality and shrinkage goals. They wore them when the corporate suit cooked them a steak dinner.

The auction was not the absolute last hurrah for the plant.

Kelley Brooks, the GE manager in charge of decommissioning the plant, said about eight weeks of work remains at the site.

"We're in the mode of getting the building in the best condition we can for the next user," he said.



A liquidation auction was held at the closed General Electric Plant on Apple Valley Road Wednesday.



Among those who attended Wednesday's auction at General Electric Consumer & Industrial's Winchester Lamp Plant were some of the thousands of employees who were the heart and soul of the plant during its 35-year run that ended Sept. 23.

Company spokesman Deborah Wexler said some inquiries have been made about the 455,000-square-foot plant on 57 acres, but there's been no serious interest or offers. Its list price is \$13 million.

"As economic conditions improve," she said, "we're very hopeful it will sell and transition to a use that benefits the community."

While it's highly doubtful GE secrets still exist at the site, corporate policy continues to be followed to the letter. Cameras were not allowed inside the building.

The event was conducted by Charleston Auctions, a Fort Wayne, Ind., a company that does similar sales across the country. Last week it liquidated a GE motors plant in Dothan, Ala. Two other GE auctions are upcoming in Oakville, Ontario, Canada.

The auction catalog listed 559 lots, but the number sold was difficult to discern. Some lots were sold together; others popped up that weren't on the list.

Included among the lots were items that could come in handy for everyday use, like fans and ladders and refrigerators. And some lots, like welders and pallets of motors, would be great for many businesses.

Other lots, like the autoranging combiscope or Fanuc robots, probably are used by specific industries.

Items that could be used by a wide range of people - including tools - drew plenty of interest.

Jason and Jennifer McDonald of Stephens City had their eyes on flammable-liquid storage cabinets to use at Springwood Farms, where they raise fruit, crops and livestock.

Tom Miller of Berryville and Jerry Kelleher of Fairfax both were looking to pick up equipment or other items they could use, but the competition was steep for many lots.

"Like every guy here, I'd like to have some tools," Miller said, "but they're going at a premium."

Miller, who was looking for items for personal use as well as for his business, Precision Grinding, picked up a pallet jack for \$100.

Others, like Chris Hansen, were in search of deals. The president of CIE Surplus in Berryville was seeking items to resell at a profit.

He didn't bother with tools that were selling high, but he had early success picking up a lot featuring multiple tables with vises attached to them.

"There are deals to be made when you get to the big lots," Hansen said, "when there's so much stuff that most people can't [resell] them."

He said he should get a good return when he sells the vises, and he'd already struck a deal to sell the tables to a man who removes the tops and uses them as butcher's blocks.

GE and Charleston Auctions weren't the only people making money at the Apple Valley Road site. The Powhatan Ruritans from Strasburg operated a food trailer, raising money to be funneled back into the community.

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