

BUSINESS NEWS

Location change really no issue here

Caterpillar Inc. created some uncertainty in downstate Illinois with its announcement Tuesday that it would move its headquarters from Peoria to Chicago, despite having previously unveiled plans for a move to remain in Peoria.



However, the unexpected shift was not anticipated to affect the present or future of the Pontiac facility, according to Caterpillar spokesman Rachel Potts and Adam Dontz, CEO of the Greater Livingston County Economic Development Council.

Potts told other area media that the company was not anticipating changes regarding the Pontiac facility, nor would it much affect jobs in Peoria for that matter.

“We don’t anticipate changes in Pontiac, and really, even in Peoria,” she said. “The vast majority of our employees will not relocate. We have chosen to tell our employees and the community leaders about our plans early. We understand there is a range of emotions people are going through, but in the end, our singular focus is to grow this company and in order to do that, we have to prioritize our resources.”

Dontz told the Daily Leader that he was “pleased the GLCEDC and local units of government could work with Caterpillar to maintain and increase their employment level at the Pontiac facility.” He added that “Caterpillar has been, and continues to be, an excellent corporate citizen of the Pontiac and Livingston County community.”

One representative of Livingston County who was less than pleased with the move, however, was Rep. Jason Barickman. Barickman, R-Bloomington, issued a release following the move, calling it “extremely disappointing.”

“It’s extremely disappointing to see jobs moving out of Central Illinois, even if they will remain in the state,” he said. “This just goes to show that no jobs or businesses can be taken for granted, no matter how long they have been in our communities.

“Caterpillar is an important engine in the

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downstate economy, and one of our state's top employers. We've been told that the great majority of Peoria-based employees will remain here, and we will need to be vigilant to make sure they remain here long-term."

When reached for comment, a representative of the United Auto Workers Local 2096 said that its President Rob Drysdale and Bargaining Chairman were in the midst of contract negotiations in Peoria.

Caterpillar had unveiled plans in 2015 to build its new campus across the street from the current headquarters in Peoria after demolishing a Chase Bank building, which the company acquired in 2012, the Peoria Journal

Star reported. The project had the potential to be included in a downtown transformation, which has begun with infrastructure improvements and residential additions.

Instead, the company announced Tuesday that it was moving its headquarters to the Chicago area and wouldn't build a new complex in its current Peoria location.

New Caterpillar CEO Jim Umpleby said the company intends to collaborate with Peoria to find a good use for the property. But the status of an entire block downtown is now in question, said Mark Misselhorn, chairman of the city's Downtown Advisory Commission.

"Obviously, that's a big chunk of the central part of downtown that was to be demolished," Misselhorn said.