

## Clarion fiberboard plant featured at community breakfast

By HEATHER LESKANIC



Photo by Ron Wilshire - Jean desAutels, general manager of Clarion Boards, addresses the crowd.

CLARION - Forecasts of a growing customer base for its flooring product and a major project to build a new laminate plant next to the Clarion fiberboard plant were detailed Thursday at a Clarion community breakfast event.

Jean desAutel, general manager of Clarion Boards Inc. in Paint Township, discussed the various developments at the facility that is a joint venture of Aconcagua Timber Corp. and Tarkett.

Officials are in the permitting process to build a new 330,000-square-foot automated plant at an estimated cost of \$40 to \$50 million.

It is projected to be in full production by this time next year, said desAutel, providing 90 to 100 new jobs.

Clarion is to become the North American headquarters for Tarkett Laminate.

The facility produces wood panels and laminate for the North and South American markets.

Thursday's event was sponsored by the Clarion Community Relations Committee and held at the American Legion banquet room on Main Street.

The laminate market is expected to increase 15 percent per year for the next three years, according to desAutel.

Tarkett sales top \$1.8 billion worldwide.

And in one year, the United States is expected to account for 40 percent of worldwide sales.

Clarion Boards currently has about 110 employees.

The current facility will serve as the main supplier of the new automated plant, consuming 30 percent of its capacity.

### CLARION WAS 'PERFECT LOCATION'

DesAutel said Clarion was the best location for the enterprise, with an excellent workforce and supply of hardwood.

The company's wood supply is coming from a distance of 300 miles or less.

"We have a much better raw material to manufacture our product," said desAutel. "Producing where you sell is important."

The flooring product will be distributed to area locations, he said.

A transportation dilemma brought about late last year due to the loss of the Knox & Kane Railroad has been resolved, he said.

DesAutel said the use of reload centers in DuBois and Butler have helped to bring shipment schedules back to normal.

#### PROACTIVE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

DesAutel said Tarkett is the first flooring company that can remove an existing floor and reuse it to make new flooring.

The company considers protecting the environment a top priority, he said.

"This (reuse) is a good example of what Tarkett wants to do," the manager added.

The company's response earlier this month to a water runoff problem that was discovered at Doe Run is further evidence of this commitment to the environment, said desAutel.

Plant officials say they are addressing the issue, which involves the buildup of sedimentation and a hole in a stormwater retention pond.

"We're doing everything we can . . . to correct the problem," said desAutel.

The water in the stream, which is a tributary to the Clarion River, had turned very dark.

Acid from wood chips caused the discoloration, according to DEP officials.

The DEP and Fish Commission are reviewing the incident.

DesAutel said the hole was likely the result of a burrowing animal.

University president Joseph P. Grunenwald later credited Clarion Boards with its immediate response to the discovery.

"It's the mark of the kind of company we want to have here," he said.

The fiberboard plant is also working to increase the area's average family income in a significant way, said Grunenwald.

DesAutel said the cooperation from the area's economic development officials has been appreciated.

"It's been very good," he said. "We couldn't ask for more."

Clarion Borough Mayor John Stroup also offered remarks at the breakfast meeting.

DesAutel shared other facts about the facility, including that it is the largest gas consumer in Clarion County.

The plant is equal to 3,000 households, he said.

And, the Tarkett corporation will celebrate its 125th anniversary this year.