

Retrofitting for more capacity

By Tara Marion

One Grand Rapids supplier is reusing to ramp up.

Lack's Enterprises Inc.'s Wheel Trim System, a tier-one, full-service supplier of automotive wheel components and systems, will expand plating operations with the opening of Barden Plating in Kentwood.

Headquartered in Grand Rapids, Lacks Enterprises is a privately-held company with three other plating operations in the region. Plastic-Plate/Monroe in Grand Rapids and Airline North and South Plating in Kentwood are plating and assembly plants.

Molding, assembly and distribution are the functions of Airline Northwest in Kentwood.

"We name most of our plants after the streets that they're on," explained Roger Andrzejewski, human resources director at Lacks.

The Wheel Trim Systems division's list of nationally recognized clients, such as **Ford Motor Co.**, **DaimlerChrysler** and **General Motors Corp.**, precipitated the opening of Barden Plating.

"We needed additional plating capacity for the 2006 fiscal year," Andrzejewski said.

The facility, under renovation by **Pioneer Construction** of Grand Rapids, was once a Lacks distribution center.

"We decided to convert this building into a plater to save the additional time it would take to put up a new building from a Greenfield site," Andrzejewski explained. "We moved product into a leased warehouse of Kraft Street, and we have just broken ground for a new replacement distribution center adjacent to our Barden assembly plant."

We have totally reconfigured the building to accommodate what they hope to have in there—the plating," said Jim Czanko, marketing, sales and development director for Pioneer.

Retrofitting the distribution center into a manufacturing facility involved taking up the floor, installing protective liners and reconfiguring the space.

"It's very, very detailed, and it's a very, very intricate system that has gone on there," Czanko said.

Czanko was pleased that Lacks Enterprises didn't just disregard the building or tear it down.

"Here's another example of where you retrofit an existing facility to accommodate a new process. I think that's very important."

The building is 156,400 square feet – about an eighth of the available space will be allocated to offices and the remainder to one automated plating line.

Pilot production is set to begin this summer. The plant will be fully functional on Aug. 1 of this year.

The Kentwood expansion will add 106 employees to the company. "And those are all new jobs to the corporation and the area," Andrzejewski said.

Lacks Enterprises already employs 1,930 people in the region.

The corporation is a privately-owned global manufacturer for the automotive and consumer products markets.