

\$3M lift for Benton Foundry



WORKERS stand steel Monday as the addition to the Benton Foundry progresses. It is located in Sugarloaf Township.

State invests 'mind-blowing' sum in a Columbia 'quiet success'

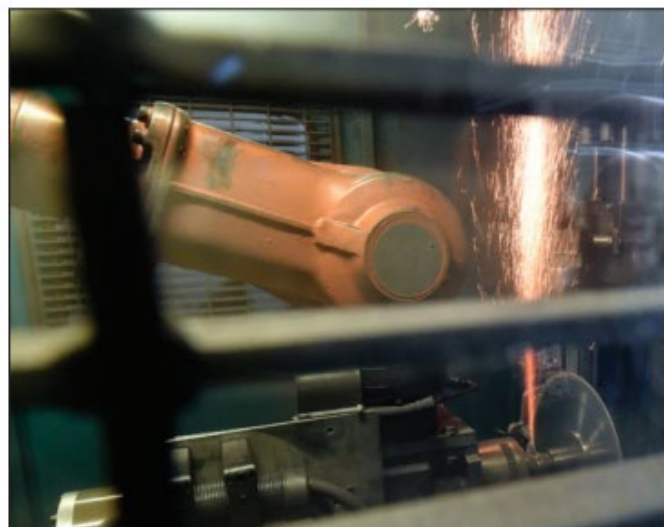
By **JULYE WEMPLE**
Press Enterprise Writer

SUGARLOAF TWP. — Benton Foundry will get a \$3 million grant from the state to help fund its continuing expansion, state Sen. John Gordner announced Monday.

It's the largest check the state's Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program has ever given Columbia County, Gordner said.

"For Benton, this is mind-blowing," Gordner said in a recent visit to the foundry. "It's incredible, the investment being made here."

The money, which requires matching funds from the company, will be used to
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A robot, above, grinds away the rough edges on a metal product at the Benton Foundry on Monday. The company received a \$3 million grant it will put toward two more robots as part of the expansion work in Sugarloaf Township.

The wall on the end of a booth spins around, in photo at left. It brings out a filed-off cast-metal item as it swings the next one to the robot that does the work.

PHOTOS BY JIMMY MAY

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buy robotic equipment that will help bring the foundry up to capacity, company President Jeff Hall said.

The foundry is in the midst of a \$20 million investment and expansion project that's been in the works for almost a decade, Hall explained.

The company has the ability to process 300 tons of iron ore a day, but other departments can't match that pace, Hall said. For now, the foundry is limited to 225 tons a day to prevent a bottleneck elsewhere in the plant.

The money, awarded through the state's Office of the Budget, will add equipment in the foundry's core and grinding rooms, which not only will help increase production, but make the job less laborious for workers on the floor.

With the new equipment and expansion, the foundry hopes to add 30 workers to its payroll immediately, and 30 more in the future. It currently employs 225 workers.

"This place is hustling and bustling," Gordner said. "It's one of those quiet success stories."

'Not just a pin on the map'

Twenty years ago, there was a push to recruit out-of-state companies to move to Pennsylvania. It was the

investments in local companies, though, that ultimately generated the most success, Gordner said.

"We're not just a pin on the map here for you folks," he said. "You appreciate the location, you appreciate the workers and you appreciate everything they do."

The foundry is a third-generation family-owned business, and the fourth generation just started working on the floor a few months ago, Hall said.

State Rep. David Millard praised the foundry for its decades of job creation and continuity, especially in such a rural setting.

"You were committed to do this and we'd like to see you continue," he said.

Columbia County Commissioner Chris Young also noted the positive economic impact the foundry and its expansions over the years has had for the county and for the tiny community of Benton.

"We all know people who work here and this expansion is fantastic," Young said.

The foundry is adding an additional 40,000-square-feet onto the existing building and hopes to employ 300 people once the expansion is complete.

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