

## **Kia says plant to open on schedule**

*From staff and wire reports*

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The man charged with hiring workers for the the Kia Motors plant in West Point said it's absolutely false that the factory opening has been delayed.

"The project is still on schedule for November 2009. We have hung our hat on that, and we want people locally to know that things have not changed," said Randy Jackson, director of human resources for Kia Motors Manufacturing Georgia.

Jackson spoke today after a report in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution newspaper quoted industry observers as suggesting that the factory might not open until spring 2010, citing reasons including weak sales and overcapacity.

A top company official in Seoul also disputed the reports.

"It will not be delayed," Kim Deukju, the Korean automaker's finance chief, told the Associated Press. "Usually we have kept our promises. I think we can meet our initial target." Kim dismissed the Atlanta newspaper's article, saying those quoted "have their own estimate."

"So far we don't have any plan to review our schedule," Kim said.

Construction has begun and is "on schedule," he added.

Not only has construction begun, Jackson said, but progress is rapid. Construction crews earlier this month began drilling holes and pouring the 5,000 pilings for the massive plant at the rate of 300 per day, he said. The pad will be poured once the pilings are in place, he said.

"We've got trucks on the site, equipment on the site, construction people working hard on the site. We've got local subcontractors helping. The place is busy and it's not stopping," Jackson said.

Diethard Lindner, chairman of the Development Authority of LaGrange, said this morning that his observations show no sign that the project is "stuck in the slow lane," as the Atlanta newspaper's headline said.

The two most obvious signs of progress – and of Kia's significant financial investment – are the extensive engineering under way on the building and the pouring of massive pilings, a preliminary to pouring the foundation, Lindner said.

“The engineering involves a significant amount of money on their part,” he said. “The pilings are below ground, so you can’t see them yet, but they are making significant progress on that.”

Kia, South Korea’s second-largest automaker, announced in March 2006 that it would set up its first U.S. plant in Georgia.

It said at the time that production would begin in 2009 and that the \$1.2 billion factory would employ 2,500 workers.

Jackson said he and other Kia personnel are working “night and day” to complete the hiring plan and he is working on a daily basis with state officials and the QuickStart program.

“I was here last night, working on the benefit plan. We are aggressively looking at hiring plans. Suppliers are here every day. ... The construction people are all working toward the November 2009 date. (Human resources) is working toward that date. We are all working together toward that date,” he said this morning.

Kia also has said that five to six auto suppliers are expected to set up near the factory, which it says would create an additional 2,000 jobs.

Lindner said he and others close to the project remain confident that Troup County will land more major suppliers, in addition to Mobis Georgia, which earlier this month announced plans to locate a facility on the Kia site. The plant, which will employ up to 700 people to supply front-end modules, front-rolling chassis modules, rear chassis modules and cockpit modules, along with front and rear bumpers.

Dismissing the Atlanta newspaper article as “others’ speculation and spin out of control,” Jackson said, “I don’t want local people to get upset. ... We know what’s happening in our own back yard. We are on target and we are going to stay on target.”