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LOCKPORT Plant that nearly closed seeks discount power to expand

By THOMAS J. PROHASKA
NEWS NIAGARA BUREAU
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LOCKPORT - The Allvac plant on Ohio Street, which nearly closed three years ago, is seeking discount hydroelectric power to expand and add 11 new jobs.

The plant, which employs about 60 workers, produces nickel-based alloys used in aircraft engines and frames, electrical turbines and undersea pipes used in oil exploration.

New York Power Authority spokesman Michael Salzman said this week that the authority had received a request from Allvac for expansion power from the Niagara Power Project.

Company spokesman Dan L. Greenfield said that power would be an important factor if Allvac's parent company, Allegheny Technologies, is to choose the Lockport plant for the expansion over other Allvac plants in Pennsylvania and North Carolina.

Asked if Lockport would be ruled out for the expansion if the hydropower isn't obtained, Greenfield said, "I'm not sure it's that clear-cut."

According to a letter by Lockport plant manager Jeff Gmerek seeking support from local public officials, the \$10 million expansion would add four furnaces and upgrade an existing one, while adding a new chemical laboratory and installing a new saw and grinder.

Gmerek, who was unavailable to comment last week, wrote that the Lockport plant has the highest electric costs of any plant in the Allvac system.

Niagara County Legislature Chairman William L. Ross and Lockport Mayor Michael W. Tucker are among those who wrote letters of support for Allvac's request to the Power Authority.

Tucker said, "Anytime business is expanding, adding people in manufacturing, it's a big thing."

Salzman said the application for low-cost power is being reviewed by Authority staffers, who visited the Lockport plant recently "to assess its power needs."

In 2002, the plant almost closed because of a drop-off in the airline industry following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Two-thirds of the workers were laid off.

However, Allvac now is a key supplier to Boeing and Airbus, both of which are planning new jumbo jetliners.

"Aerospace is currently very strong. These planes use very large engines," Greenfield said

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