Roseburg News Review photo

▲ **Steve Swanson, president of Swanson Group's sawmill and plywood mill in Glendale, employs about 350 workers.**

TIMOTHY BULLARD/Daily Courier

◀ **Electronics Sub Assembly Manufacturing, or ESAM, has 88 people making electronic components for medical, gaming, telecommunication and many other types of equipment.**

# Economy

From Page 1D

But it takes care of Grants Pass first. The majority of playgrounds in this area feature Playcraft Systems, built by Krauss Craft.

"We like to take care of our own backyards. So many people don't even realize we're out here," office manager Margaret Miller said during a recent tour.

Melinda Matson, president of the Grants Pass Kiwanis Club, said Krauss Craft offered a "tremendous" discount, so a recent project to put playground equipment at Schroeder Park could be nearly doubled.

The recognition is beginning to pile up. In June 2012, Chief Operating Officer C.J. Schatza accepted the prosperity award from Southern Oregon Regional Economic Development Inc. The company has earned local Chamber of Commerce awards during the past two years.

Everything about the company screams success these days, including brand-new office space. The company has expanded at least four times in the past seven years, and expects to add more manufacturing space in the coming year, Miller said.

Inside her new office, design supervisor Katrina Garland was bone-tired from an all-nighter working on the company catalog, but still energized enough to talk about playgrounds. On her computer screen flashed a $200,000 structure being designed for a customer in oil-rich Dubai, halfway around the world, destined for a school or park.

In the next room, other designers tinkered with layouts on several computer screens.

Garland, who used to design homes in Southern California, then cheerfully mentioned the slide planned to whisk future tour guests from her offices down to the manufacturing floor.

Back on the plant floor, a worker checked an automated router cutting out forms of wood for the plastic roof of a playhouse. A bit farther, about 50 examples of playgrounds, none of them the same, filled a design board.

A slide show on the company's Facebook page runs through dozens of playground themes — cities, castles, circuses, rockets, schoolhouses — and special features such as the Trans-Glide accessible by wheelchair. The combinations of themes and components are endless.

TIMOTHY BULLARD/Daily Courier

**Rogue Valley Door continues to thrive in its F Street location in Grants Pass. Custom wood doors are produced there, with 240 employees. The company started as Rogue Valley Sash and Door in 1986.**

"That's what's unique about Playcraft, we don't have any cookie-cutter playgrounds," Miller said. "Every one's different."

Beyond another huge wall, molding machines churn out spiral staircases, slides, climbing walls, steps and a myriad of other plastic components. We didn't even check out the steel fabrication end of the plant, where the all-important supports of those playgrounds are masterfully constructed. Outside, pallets of plastic-wrapped future playgrounds waited to be trucked in all directions.

In March, dozens of people from several countries will meet at Krauss Craft for the annual design meeting, where new ideas will be revealed. It's a long way from the original wooden swingsets built by Kurt Krauss years ago, and from even a decade ago when Krauss took over the former Coachmen RV plant and had just 40 employees after the move from Cave Junction.

The company founder stays plenty grounded. On this day, he was busy unloading a pickup truck of materials.

"Kurt's fingerprints are on everything that goes through here," Miller said.

Miller got on board a little over two years ago after working with Krauss Craft to build the new playground at Cave Junction's Jubilee Park.

"I love my job because it's a happy place," Miller said. "When you put playgrounds into a community, it's so rewarding."

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Besides Krauss Craft, the county has another 130 or so manufacturers, and many of them keep a pretty low profile.

Siskiyou Design on Booth Street has about 50 employees in its 14,000-square foot building, where more than 800 products and parts are machined and fabricated, many used in the medical field.

The company has been operating since 1972.

Met One Instruments has made particle counters for high-tech clean rooms and wind sensors for more than 30 years, and occupies two buildings on Northwest Washington Boulevard. With the expansion to the former U.S. Forest Service building on Greenfield Road north of Interstate 5, Met One numbers 120 total employees.

"We've been growing in spite of everything," said Connie Boehm, director of human resources.

Another large firm, Electronics Sub Assembly Manufacturing in east Grants Pass, has 88 people making electronic components for medical, gaming, telecommunication and many other types of equipment.

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The wood products sector suffered a blow when 85 people lost jobs with the Rough and Ready Lumber mill closure in May in Cave Junction. But most other local wood products businesses have shown improvement over the past few years.

Swanson Group's sawmill and plywood mill in Glendale, just across the Douglas County line, has seen steady growth since the workforce was cut to just over 200 workers in 2009.

President Steve Swanson said the business is running at near-capacity, with two shifts at the sawmill, two on the layup and three on the dryers at the plywood operation, and a total of 350 workers. About a third of those workers live in Grants Pass, he said.

"We've had a lot of growth in the last year," he said.

Swanson upgraded its sawmill with fully automated grading of wood before it goes through the planer. Cameras and lasers detect defects which are either cut out or the lumber removed.

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