

Marukan celebrates grand opening for local plant

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Community leaders came out Wednesday to celebrate the grand opening of Marukan's new rice vinegar brewery in Griffin.

Located on 16.2 acres in the Lakes at Green Valley industrial park, the 77,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art brewery is the Japanese company's second U.S. plant.

"We've running at capacity in Paramount, California — which is what led to expansion in the United States," said Jon Tanklage, president of Marukan Vinegar USA.

He worked for 15 years at the California facility and moved to Griffin a year ago.

The company, which began in Japan in 1649, made a \$30 million investment in the Griffin plant. There are currently has 15 employees, with two dozen projected by the end of the year, according to assistant plant manager Teddy Blalock.

Initial capacity, Blalock said, is 400 cases a day. Phase 1 is expected to have an annual production of 325,00 gallons of rice vinegar and up to 650,000 gallons a



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Officials who worked on the Marukan project cut the ribbon Wednesday at the grand opening for the 77,000-square-foot facility in the Lakes at Green Valley industrial park. Pictured, from left, are Kajima Building & Design President Shin Urano; Counsel-General of Japan in Atlanta Takashi Shinozuka; Marukan Vinegar Owner, Chairman and CEO Denzaemon Sasada; Marukan Vinegar USA President Jon Tanklage; Georgia Department of Economic Development Division Director Scott McMurray; and Griffin-Spalding Development Authority Chairman Chuck Copeland.

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state to participate in the program. The city's participation will begin with the 2018 tax season.

The program will work by the AOC transmitting Municipal Court requests to the Department of Revenue to intercept state income tax refunds for outstanding judgments that the city's court clerk submits, O'Connor explained. There is an opportunity for a hearing if a debtor contests the legality of the intercept or the amount of the intercept.

"There are a lot of safety measures included for the debtor," O'Connor said.

Debtors are given 30 days notice to come in to the city to pay the debt on their own.

"They do not have to immediately have to pay the debt with their tax refund," O'Connor said.

Debtors are also given 30 days to contest the debt. If contested, a hearing is held before the matter is resolved. O'Connor said only three hearings were requested statewide since the TRIP program began in 2016.

State Court Judge Sid Esary has been appointed the city's hearing officer should a hearing is

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year at Phase 2. Blalock said there is room for internal, which would be in Phase 2, with room on the property to double the size of the building for Phase 3.

During a plant tour, as part of the grand opening celebration, Blalock said the facility gets a truck load of rice every two weeks, with the rice grown in the Sacramento valley. He explained the brewing process, which starts with making sake, then brewing it and aging it to make the vinegar.

He said it takes about two months from rice to vinegar. All of the food served at the grand opening was prepared with vinegar produced at the Griffin plant, Blalock said.

Denzaemon Sasada — the 10th generation owner and CEO of Marukan Vinegar Company — gave a history of the company, founded 368 years ago in Japan. He said the company began exporting to the United States after World War II and began packaging the product in Los Angeles in 1974.

Sasada said they were asked to buy the packaging and distribution facility, and after consideration, acquired it in 1986, adding the brewing in 1988.

His father said when the purchase was made they would only expand when the building became too small.

"Today, I am very glad to report to my father, who passed away 33 years ago, that the building became too small," Sasada said.

The Griffin facility, he said "is the most modern facility while keeping our traditions of over three centuries. It is good for us to work harder to supply quality products."

"We have to keep working hard for the product to be satisfying," he added.

He noted they also "have to be good to society, to try to be good corporate citizens for the city of Griffin and state of Georgia." Part of that includes a \$10,000 annual contribution to Griffin-Spalding County Schools Partners in Education program.

Counsel General of Japan in Atlanta Takashi Shinozuka also spoke, noting he's been here a number of times and "I know more will be coming." Shinozuka thanked Marukan for being invited on such an auspicious occasion, noting he was born in Kobe, home of the Japanese plant, and in his job has worked with the imperial family which uses Marukan products.

"Water from Griffin, mixed with rice from California makes the vinegar we tasted today," he said. "In 32 years, I hope my successor is here to celebrate

the 400th anniversary of Marukan."

The Griffin water, as part of the location process for the plant, according to Griffin-Spalding Development Authority Chairman Chuck Copeland, "was shipped to Japan for testing — and passed with flying colors."

Copeland said he's always asked about local jobs with the new industries. "I can give a resounding yes," with Teddy Blalock, the assistant plant manager, who lives about two miles from the plant, "and is a darn good baseball coach."

Copeland also thanked the voters of Spalding County who passed the 2008 SPLOST, which was used to buy the land for the Lakes at Green Valley industrial park. He thanked the city and county officials involved in the process, and the Georgia Department of Economic Development.

"There's no better friend to the Griffin-Spalding Development Authority than Scott McMurray," Copeland said.

McMurray, division director with Georgia Department of Economic Development, said that with Marukan, as well as Toppan and Otsuka, "is now the most successful industrial park in the state of Georgia." He also thanked Spalding County voters "for approving the special tax to invest in this park and in jobs."