



Inteplast celebrates 25 years, innovation at Lolita Plant

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Tables of people made the rounds, going to each of the other circular tables that sat about 10 people and multiple plates of food to clink their wine glasses, beer cans and water cups together in congratulations.

Employees were toasting Inteplast Group's good health on its 25th birthday in an event hall less than nine miles from the integrated plastics manufacturer's flagship plant in Lolita.

The Lolita plant was built in 1991 and today accounts for nearly half of the company's annual sales revenue despite being one of more than 50 plants across the continent.

"We've done the right thing to invest so big, so large in South Texas," said John Young, president of Inteplast Group, in an interview.

Although the company has made significant strides since it first opened, officials hope to remain close to the roots that were planted a quarter of a century ago, Young told the hundreds of employees at the dinner.

General plant manager Peter Zamarripa moved to Lolita to be near his wife, who is from the area. He signed on three years after the company opened and has been with Inteplast ever since.

"We went from a company that honestly, we started big and didn't have the experience, and it was a big undertaking," Zamarripa said. "We struggled for many, many years. As we put the right people in place, our management got better. Our systems have gotten better."

When the Lolita site was chosen in the early 1990s, many other manufacturers were building facilities in other countries, Young said.

Lolita was the right fit for the company because officials had the space to expand and close proximity to their resin supplier.

However, the remoteness of the location has some drawbacks. Zamarripa said the company struggles to find a good workforce that wants to locate in the area.

Because of the lack of workers, the company phased in automation of 13 production lines in the last year.

"It was not only a big change but a big undertaking," Zamarripa said. "Our people don't have experience with automation, so it was a whole new thing."

Innovation like the automation is a vital part of the plant's day-to-day operations, Zamarripa said.

As a part of a three-day conference, managers from across the company toured the Lolita plant to see changes to technologies and processes.

The company allows anyone to make suggestions and improvements to the plant processes, Young said. Under this policy, there were 1,000 improvements last year.

"It's all about grassroots movement that each person has his or her place to shine," Young said. "Everyone got to see the initiatives that have started from the floor. These little things add up."

By Taylor Tompkins
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