

Company happy to be in Geismar after it became a victim of zoning battles on former Gonzales City Council

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GEISMAR – Crawford Electric Supply, a subsidiary of the French company Sonepar, opened May 18 in its new home in Ascension Parish, a little over a year after the company became a casualty of the zoning battles on the former Gonzales City Council.

In February 2014, three city councilmen, Terance Irvin, Gary Lacombe and Timothy Vessel, killed the rezoning request that would have allowed the widely supported [Crawford Electric Supply](#) project to build on La. 44 in the city of Gonzales. “We were certainly disappointed,” said Damain Kerek, Crawford Electric’s branch manager in its industrial division, of the councilmen’s actions that scuttled the original site of the industrial wholesale supplier.

Gonzales residents were not happy to lose the company that was projected to reach sales of \$50 million by this year and create 50 new jobs. The councilmen’s actions toward the company led to the creation of “Save Gonzales,” a local grass-roots group that started a recall effort for Vessel and Lacombe. Lacombe ended up resigning, and Vessel was ousted by voters when he was recalled in an election.

In the end, though, Kerek said, Crawford Electric was “blessed with a better site” in the unincorporated community of Geismar on La. 30 near industrial plants and at eight acres, it’s almost double the size of the original site the company looked at, giving it room to expand.

"We shifted gears immediately," after last year's council action, Kerek said.

"In 48 hours, we found this location," he said of the Geismar site.

Travis Turner, the Ascension Parish councilman for District 3, which includes the Geismar area, said the opening of Crawford Electric Supply is a positive step for the parish.

"We welcome businesses who are going to come into the parish and hire people here," Turner said. "They raise tax dollars and revenue and put people to work."

Crawford Electric Supply has a staff of 24 and expects its workforce to grow, Kerek said.

The company is leasing its newly constructed 54,000-square-foot building from PHL Investments, the Ascension Parish company that developed the property.

Crawford Electric Supply, with annual sales of more than \$500 million, has locations in Louisiana and Texas. Its corporate headquarters are in Houston.

Besides its new site in Geismar, it's also in Baton Rouge and Metairie, both sites selling to residential and commercial customers, and in Lake Charles and Lafayette, with both of those sites selling to commercial and industrial customers, Kerek said.

The new Crawford Electric Supply facility in Geismar will sell to industrial, shipyard and marine customers, he said.

"Industry (in the area) has \$40 billion in construction coming up. We want to be part of it," said Kerek, who adds that Crawford Electric expects its Geismar location to see more than \$50 million in sales by the year 2016 or 2017.

The Geismar facility, which worked out of temporary locations

in Baton Rouge and Prairieville for more than a year while its Ascension Parish location was settled, sells to customers in an area from Pascagoula, Mississippi, to north of Alexandria and DeRidder, Kerek said.

"We do quite a bit nationally" as well, he said.

"Thirty percent of revenue is from outside Louisiana," he said.

The new building on La. 30 in Geismar has a large area of offices with space ready for an expanding staff.

A large conference room that seats 100 will be used for meetings and continuing education courses for industry professionals.

There's also a warehouse stocked with the wire, fittings and other electrical-system components required in industry.

Supplies on a smaller scale can be found in a retail area that sells small tools, outdoor electric cords, measuring tapes and more.

Kerek said he expects the company will see sales of "upwards of \$2.5 million a year from this (retail) counter."

A 21/2 -acre layout yard for large pipe is behind the Crawford Electric building.

On the undeveloped land behind the Geismar facility, the company is making plans to build a warehouse for specialized wire in the future, Kerek said.

Kerek is a native of Ascension Parish and has begun a tradition for Crawford Electric of supplying academic letterman jackets for St. Amant High School juniors and seniors who have a 3.5 or higher GPA.

"It's one of the things we get the most response for, from

parents and grandparents,” Kerek said.

“I grew up in Sorrento. It’s home,” he said of Ascension Parish.