

In Charge At Banquet



TIM SEIDEL, master of ceremonies, speaks at the annual Ponca City Chamber of Commerce banquet on Thursday night. Seidel is the Phillips 66 Refinery Manager. (News Photo by Rolf Clements)

OKC Bottling Plant To Close

OKMULGEE (AP) — Coca-Cola has announced that its bottling plant in eastern Oklahoma will close as part of a consolidation with the company's Oklahoma City facility.

Coca-Cola spokesman Ish Arebalos says the company is designing a new operating model to support its growth strategy. He says the changes at the Oklahoma City and Okmulgee locations could result in approximately 246 job reductions.

The Tulsa World reports that Coca-Cola employs 214 people in Okmulgee, including 104 at the bottling plant. The Okmulgee distribution center will remain open and its employees won't be affected by the bottling plant closure, which is expected to take place in March.

Arebalos says eligible associates can apply to open positions in the Oklahoma market and will be given access to job postings across Coca-Cola Southwest Beverages.

Helps Where Needed



VOLUNTEER OF THE year award was presented to Bill Stuever. The presentation was by Don Jorgenson. One the many projects was helping the Motocross in Ponca City. (News Photo by Rolf Clements)

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MJ&H Fabrication was named Industry of the Year for 2017 at the 124th Ponca City Area Chamber of Commerce banquet Thursday. Owner Gary Harvey is shown with the award, which was presented by Laurence Beliel of Ponca City Development Authority. (News Photo by Rolf Clements)

MJ&H Fabrication Is Industry of Year

The 2017 Industry of the Year award at the 124th Ponca City Area Chamber of Commerce banquet Thursday was presented to Gary and Leigh Harvey, owners of MJ&H Fabrication. Laurence Beliel from the Ponca City Development Authority made the presentation.

Beliel made the following comments in his introduction to the award:

"The Industry of the Year for 2017 has performed at an extraordinary level of achievement and engagement in our community and beyond. In addition to recognizing this year's outstanding achiever, it's also an opportunity for us as a community to step back and say, 'Thank You', to one of many of the economic engines in Ponca City. Thank you for being in Ponca City, thank you for continuing to build our community, thank you for being there ... day in and day out ... providing jobs and paychecks that drive our economy.

As with most years, 2017 had no shortage of candidates. In my job, I have the great privilege of working with Ponca City industries on a daily basis which gives me the chance to get to know these economic heroes on a personal level. To see what they do ... to understand their challenges ... to experience their anguish during those painful times when layoffs are necessary and yes ... to see their pride and to sense the possibilities as they say the words, 'You're Hired' to someone needing a job ... are all powerful moments. I know how much they care because I've seen how much they care.

The Industry of the Year award is about real, solid accomplishments and not so much the glitz and glamour of a Chamber of Commerce banquet. It's about stepping up when you're community needs you ... it's about innovation ... it's about adaptability ... it's about community involvement ... it's about creating a team that employees are proud to call their own, it's about creating community partnerships ... it's making a community a better place because you are in it ... and last but certainly not least ... it's about getting things done.

So let's take a look at this year's honoree. When one of our industrial companies announced their shutdown and began their layoffs due to the downturn in oil, this company actively sought out some of the affected employees and offered them jobs. When they faced the nationwide problem of finding more welders, they didn't wait for someone else to solve their problem ... they organized a two day welding competition at Pioneer Technology Center

with the 1st, 2nd and 3rd place winners all given jobs upon graduation. (nice prizes were given too). This worked so well ... they hired a fourth from this competition as well.

Our honoree and his team are kind of a big deal. As a matter of fact ... many of their products are a big deal! For they are manufacturers of really large vessels ... some people think of them as simply a tank. However, these vessels must pass stringent tests for they are used in fields as diverse as the oil and gas industries to munitions disposal ... where withstanding high temperatures and pressures are an absolute must. As you might guess ... the extreme quality demand requires expert certifications and a high level of craftsmanship ... a level of expertise delivered by the company and its 90 employees.

When some of their finished products, products we can all point to and proudly say, 'that was made in Ponca City,' were just too big to get under the traffic signal arms, the company designed and installed ... at their expense ... an innovative swivel base that allows traffic signals to be easily moved out of the way of large loads (30 feet wide and 32 high) by the City's traffic control crews. When Hurricane Harvey struck Houston, a city whom Ponca City has significant business and personal relations, this company organized a mission to help. They solicited local donations in Ponca City and other communities and then ... delivered the donations door-to-door and spent days cooking at different sites and different communities for the countless and unknown relief workers. They did this ... not because it let the people of Houston know that Ponca City stood with them ... although it did. They did this ... not because it was a great way to remind companies in the Houston area of their connections to Ponca City ... although it did that too. This did this ... not because it brought glory to the company's name. This did this for one simple reason ... they cared.

It wasn't too long ago that the northwest corner of Hall and Sykes Boulevard in the Airport Industrial Park was nothing but a grassy field. As a matter of fact ... until the company came along in 2013 ... there wasn't even a Northwest corner of Hall and Sykes Boulevard. Today it's a beehive of activity and a beehive that has produced so much for their employees and for our local economy.

Please join me in congratulating...Gary and Leigh Harvey, owners of the Ponca City Area Chamber of Commerce 2017 Industry of the Year, M J & H Fabrication."

Turkey Vows To Continue Moving East

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan vowed on Friday to expand Ankara's operation in a Kurdish enclave in northern Syria eastward, toward the frontier with Iraq.

His comments, during an address to local leaders of his ruling-party in Ankara, appeared to be in defiance of the United States, which has urged Turkey to keep its campaign in Syria "limited in scope and duration" and to focus on ending the war.

Erdogan said the Turkish forces' push into Afrin would stretch further east, to the Syrian Kurdish town of Manbij, and toward the border with Iraq "until no terrorist is left."

Turkey considers the Syrian Kurdish forces, known as the People's Protection Units or YPG, as a terrorist group because of their purported links to Kurdish insurgents within Turkey's own border. Manbij is held by the Syrian Democratic Forces, which is dominated by the YPG. U.S. troops are not present in Afrin but are embedded with the SDF in other parts of Syria, where they are working to prevent a resurgence of the Islamic State group.

"We will clear Manbij of terrorists ... No one should be disturbed by this because the real owners of Manbij are not these terrorists, they are our Arab brothers," Erdogan said. "From Manbij, we will continue our struggle up to the border with Iraq, until no terrorist is left."

Ankara's push into Manbij would put Turkish troops in proximity to American soldiers there.

Erdogan remarks came on the seventh day of the Turkish incursion into Afrin, which started last Saturday.

Meanwhile, Turkey's Health Minister Ahmet Demirean said Friday the operation into Afrin had led to 14 deaths on the Turkish side. Three Turkish soldiers and 11 Syrian opposition fighters allied with them were killed in fighting since Jan. 20, he said. Some 130 others were wounded.

The SDF said the first week of Turkey's incursion had left more than a 100 civilians and fighters dead. The group said in a statement Friday that among the dead are 59 civilians and 43 fighters, including eight women fighters. At least 134 civilians were wounded in the weeklong clashes, it added.

Turkey's military said at least 343 "terrorists" have been "neutralized" during the campaign, a figure the Syrian Kurdish dispute.

In his speech, Erdogan slammed the U.S. alliance with the Kurdish forces in Manbij and other parts of Syria.

"Our greatest sadness is to see these terrorist organizations run wild holding U.S. flags in this region," Erdogan said.

Erdogan said President Donald Trump asked him "not to criticize us so much" during their telephone call on Wednesday.

"Okay," said Erdogan, quoting what he allegedly told Trump in the conversation. "But how can a strategic partner do such a thing to its strategic partner?"

Erdogan also accused the Syrian Kurdish militia of using civilians as human shields in Afrin to try and slow down the advance of the Turkish forces and of the Turkish-backed Syrian opposition fighters.

He also criticized calls by U.S. and other allies for a quick resolution of Turkey's incursion, saying military interventions in places in Afghanistan and Iraq lasted for several years.

Late Thursday, the Pentagon described Turkey's military operations in Afrin as not helpful and threatening to damage the ongoing fight against Islamic State militants in Syria.

Joint Staff Director Lt. Gen. Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr. said U.S. military commanders continue to talk with Turkey about the establishment of some type of safe zone along the Turkey-Syria border.

Report: Dutch Spies Caught Russian Hackers on Tape

AMSTERDAM (AP) — The Netherlands' spy service broke into the computers used by a powerful Russian hacking group and may be sitting on evidence relating to the breach of the U.S. Democratic National Committee, a Dutch newspaper and television show jointly reported Friday.

Reports carried in the respected daily Volkskrant and the current affairs show Nieuwsuur say hackers working for the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service penetrated the computers used by the group, often nicknamed Cozy Bear, in mid-2014 and watched them for at least a year, even managing to catch the hackers on camera.

Dutch Interior Minister Kajsa Ollongren, interviewed by reporters in The Hague before the government's weekly Cabinet meeting, declined to address the report, saying

only that she was "very happy that we have good security services in the Netherlands that do their work well."

President Vladimir Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said he had yet to see any official comment from the Dutch intelligence services on the matter.

"If the Dutch media want to fuel anti-Russian hysteria in the U.S., it's an activity that can't be called honorable," he added.

Volkskrant and Nieuwsuur said that the Dutch spies used their access to help oust Cozy Bear from U.S. State Department computers in late 2014. Volkskrant said American spies were so grateful they sent the Dutch cake and flowers.

Cozy Bear would later be identified as one of two Russian government-linked hacking groups that broke in to the DNC ahead of the 2016 presidential election; the other is usually called Fancy Bear.

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