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"We had to get quicker and bigger to keep up with demand."

Jay Evers, Milo's Tea vice president and chief operating officer



NEWS STAFF/KERRY AYRES

Jay Evers, vice president and chief operating officer of Milo's Tea Co., says a plan to expand the company's distribution network is prompting an expansion of its Bessemer plant.

Milo's Tea brews big plan for its plant, distribution

By STACI BROWN BROOKS
News staff writer

Milo's Tea Co., which calls itself "the Great Southern Tea Company," is forging ahead with a plan to make its motto known beyond Alabama's borders.

A company official says an expansion at the Bessemer factory will double production capacity at the site, which is less than 2 years old. The facility will grow to about 43,000 square feet and be able to produce about 70,000 gallons of tea daily.

The expansion comes just months after Milo's Tea partnered with Barber's Dairy and Mississippi-based Lu-Vel Dairy to increase distribution in Southern Alabama and neighboring states.

"We had to get quicker and bigger to keep up with demand," said Jay Evers, the company's vice president and chief operating officer. He said the increased distribution area accelerated expansion plans already being considered.

Production line additions and modifications, two 5,000-gallon hold-

ing tanks and five loading docks will be among the improvements. Also, the factory's cold storage space will increase by 50 percent. "Our future upgrades will be quicker fillers and brew times," Evers said.

Work on the expansion started in November. Acton Construction, which built the original facility in Morgan Industrial Park, is expected to be done by May. Rodem Process Equipment will supply new production machinery.

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The factory expansion will add some jobs at Milo's Tea, but many more for its distributors, Evers said. More tea means more people are needed to get it delivered.

"We've got a lot of good growth out of our distribution system," Evers said.

Milo's Tea workers currently produce 35,000 gallons a day to send to state customers, as well as newer clients in Mississippi, western Georgia and the Florida Panhandle. The company made deals with eight more Panhandle stores just last week, Evers said. And it has its eyes on Tennessee and other states as well.

"Our objective is to become a regional company, and we've got some other projects we're working on," Evers said.

Milo's Tea sales have doubled in the past two years, Evers said, and his staff is hustling to keep up with demand.

"What we're doing now would have taken two full shifts at our old plant in Homewood," he said. "I'm proud of what our people have accomplished."

be surprised if it became necessary to add another shift at the Milo's Tea factory within two years.

"There are a lot of people still finding it," he said. "I think this summer's going to be wonderful. We've had people call for a long time from the beach and we haven't been able to get it to them. This will be the first full summer we've been in the Gulf."

'Very deliberate'

Milo's Tea Co. is a separate enterprise from Milo's Hamburgers, but the products of both companies are kitchen concoctions of Milo Carlton. In 1989, the tea company began distributing gallon jugs to grocery stores.

Evers said the tea company, owned by Milo Carlton's son Ronnie and Ronnie's wife, Sheila, is "very deliberate" about its business. Ideas to add to the product line are tossed around often, he said. But ultimately, Evers said, the company prefers to stay true to the format that's made it successful since it started mass marketing its tea.

"Sure, there are opportunities out there and we will come out with some new items," Evers said. "But I guess our philosophy is as we choose a new item, I'd prefer macro markets instead of micro markets. Something

But right now, he said, the company has one simple goal: to satisfy customers thirsty for its secret-recipe tea.

"We've had people come to us and say 'Why don't you make a lemonade? It would be a great complement to your line. Why don't you make bottled water? It's really profitable,'" Evers said. "We don't want to dilute the focus of making the best tea in the world with other items."