



Jay Evers proudly stands next to one of the company's trucks.

Exporting tea to the world

Only two years in Bessemer, Milo's is expanding

THE WESTERN STAR STAFF

After having been open for less than two years in Bessemer, the Milo's Tea factory on Morgan Road is expanding. Having already pushed outside the Alabama borders, the company hopes to get the entire Southeast hooked on its famous recipe tea by doubling production and widening distribution, a move that will generate a lot more jobs in the area.

When the additions are complete, which is expected to be sometime in May, the plant will be about 43,000 square feet and be capable of bottling 70,000 gallons of their brew every day.

Jay Evers, the company's vice president and chief operating officer, said that Milo's is making the move at an opportune time.

"We had to get quicker and bigger to keep up

'What we're doing now would have taken two full shifts at our plant in Homewood.'

— Jay Evers, Milo's vice president and COO

with demand," he said.

Evers added that the company's sales have doubled in the past two years, and that the increased distribution hastened along expansion projects already in planning stages.

It seems as though with every new area the tea is sent to, an even greater one responds and asks to be included.

"There are a lot of people still finding it," he said. With a shelf life of only about 25 days because the

secret recipe forbids preservatives, dairy distributors make good distribution partners.

"They are used to handling time sensitive products," Evers said.

Preservatives have absolutely no effect on the flavor whatsoever, or so the researchers say. Evers, on the other hand, knows there is a big difference.

"The bottom line is that it does affect the taste, and

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people notice. We could add all kinds of things so our tea could sit in warehouses for months [without spoiling], but then we'd taste just like everybody else."

Most recently, the company worked out a deal with a dairy in Tennessee. This will serve people as far north as Nashville.

The new expansions will open up a lot more manufacturing jobs (the real kind, not the fast-food kind). The company may even add another shift within the next two years.

With continually faster brewing times and faster filling procedures, Evers said the most jobs will come in the area of distribution.

Highly efficient

With a highly efficient production staff, the Bessemer plant has about 40 direct employees, but with all the distribution partners, the expansion will affect as many as 200.

With all the extra production, the company also had to make more room to put all the extra product. Two 5,000-gallon holding tanks will be installed and the cold storage area will get its capacity raised by 50 percent. There will also be five new loading docks so trucks will not have to wait in line for pickup.

While quite successful in the tea business, the

company has no immediate plans to expand into other beverages. Many consumers have suggested Milo's try their hand at making lemonade or bottled water. Evers countered, however, that it is the company's current standing that they should do one thing and do it well.

"We don't want to dilute the focus of making the best tea in the world with other items," he said.

You can't argue with success.

"What we're doing now would have taken two full shifts at our plant in Homewood," he said.

Even though the company is growing and seeking to blanket the entire region, calls still come in about the coverage area. For years, no city on the Gulf of Mexico has been privileged enough to feature the red-capped jugs. This will be the first summer ever that beachgoers will get to sip Milo's in the sand.

"I think this summer's going to be wonderful," he said.

With all the demand for sweet brew and workers struggling to keep up demand for it, Milo's is becoming a serious Alabama export. Alabama residents might drive across state lines to buy lottery tickets, but for a little while longer anyway, those on the other side of the line will have to come over for a nice cold glass of tea.

COMPANY AT A GLANCE

■ Milo's tea has been around since 1946, starting out as a hamburger store that sold sweet tea.

■ By this summer, the Milo's plant in Bessemer will double production to about 70,000 gallons a day.

■ Milo's hopes to fully cover the Southeast with their product.

■ The plant was moved from Homewood to Morgan Road in Bessemer two years ago.

■ About 40 people work at the Bessemer plant, but hundreds are involved in the distribution.

■ No preservatives are used in the tea, so it only lasts for about 25 days and must be kept refrigerated.