

Fibre plant launches town's new **Bio-Mile**

By DAVID HOLEHOUSE

A long-time Edmonton innovator is the first to put his stamp on Drayton Valley's new Bio-Mile integrated industrial park.

Tam Tekle of TTS Inc. made a global name for himself in optimization of composite panel plants over the years. He's worked on multiple value-added products in his lab, from new types of panel to new approaches to fireproofing construction materials.

Now he says wood is for more than OSB, and is set to install a plant in Drayton Valley that will produce various types of engineered fibre mat from farm and forestry residues. He's already inked a partnership deal with Hexion Specialty Chemicals, a global leader in resins, and aims to produce enviro-friendly fibre that can be used in anything from automotive parts to construction components.

"We had customers asking for the product, and we had people wanting to get rid of their waste or residual fibre," Tekle told directors of the Alberta Forestry Research Institute (AFRI) at a recent meeting. "Funding from AFRI (backed by the Community Development Trust Fund) helped us move ahead with plans to tackle both challenges."

TTS has purchased an ex-Canfor fibre mat plant from New Westminster and will install it at Drayton Valley in the coming months. The com-

pany is also building an interpretive centre on the Bio-Mile site, using its fibre-insulated reinforced structural panels and numerous other "green" technologies.

The Town of Drayton Valley is excited about the Bio-Mile and gave TTS a royal welcome in August, with a luncheon and sod-turning and much fanfare. The town lost 130 full-time jobs and 200 part-time jobs when Weyerhaeuser's oriented strandboard plant closed a couple of years ago and the hunt began for new economic directions. With TTS moving to town, and Otoka Energy following soon with a three-phase clean energy project, officials hope there could be about 500 new jobs created.

New industries based on bio fibre complement and feed off each other, town manger Manny Deol told The Edge. "It may start slowly, but it will attract other businesses as we move forward," he said. "Plus we see collaboration happening with the University of Alberta and researchers in Germany. Right now we feel that all the stars are aligned. Everyone wants to see innovation coming out of the fibre resources that are available."

Consultant Bill Hunter said Drayton Valley has been quick to pick up on the futuristic opportunities of high-value energy, transportation fuels, chemicals and other innovative products that can be drawn

"We are helping put Drayton Valley in a position of national leadership in the national bio-industry."

Tam Tekle, TTS Inc.



Auto parts and much more are made from bio-fibre

Fibre Mat Production Line



Tam Tekle shows samples of bio-mat product

from the region's farm and forestry fibre. He sees the possibility of 1,500 new jobs down the road, with half a billion dollars' worth of development and a like amount of sales. Other communities are watching closely, he said, including those within the Grande Alberta Economic Region, Peace River, Slave Lake and Hinton – all communities where traditional forestry jobs and revenues are under siege right now.

Tekle, meanwhile, is working with a \$1-million AVAC investment as well as \$560,000 from the Alberta Crop Industry Development Fund for his structural insulated panel line, and AFRI's contribution of \$4.5 million towards the \$11-million fibre mat line. The latter can produce 50 tonnes a day of processed fibre made from any combination of wood residues from factory, forest or municipal streams, and of agricultural fibre such as hemp and flax.

"TTS is the first out of the gate with some of these new technologies," Tekle said. "We are helping put Drayton Valley in a position of national leadership in the sustainable bio-industry, and the new mantra will be that you can do a lot more with wood besides make lumber or OSB."

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