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# Corporate vandalism

The Newberg mill used to be where Oregon sent its recycled paper. Now it's being scrapped.

By Don McIntosh

Newberg's recycled paper mill—where workers had produced lumber, newsprint and containerboard since the 1880s, is being taken apart. Atlanta-based paper giant Westrock acquired the mill in 2015 when it bought SP Fiber. Westrock said it would make improvements in the mill, but instead closed it almost immediately, terminating 200 workers, most of them members of Association of Western Pulp and Paper Workers (AWPPW). On Sept. 17, 2020, Westrock sold the 200-acre mill site lock, stock and barrel to St. Louis-based Commercial Development Company Inc. CDC is now liquidating assets at the site in stages. You've already missed the chance to bid on a 70-foot-long truck scale, but if you're in the market for an overhead bridge crane or jib crane, you have until Dec. 1.

Before it closed, the Newberg mill was turning 330,000 tons of recycled paper a year into newsprint and light-weight containerboard, which is used in making corrugated cardboard boxes. Those mill jobs paid \$28 an hour plus benefits, and they're the type of job that the Newberg area won't likely see again, says AWPPW President Greg Pallesen.

Pallesen did all he could to reopen the mill, pitching it to potential buyers, and even filing suit in 2018 to stop Westrock from acquiring



After buying and closing the Newberg mill, Westrock destroyed millions of dollars of equipment, drilling holes in giant rollers used in the paper-making process. That would have resulted in a felony conviction and prison sentence if vandals or workers had done it. But the U.S. Justice Department dismissed a union lawsuit charging Westrock with anti-competitive practices—destroying capital equipment and curtailing production to drive up prices.

another competitor, Kapstone. But the suit failed, and Westrock rebuffed all offers from companies that wanted to restart the mill, and instead offered it for sale on condition that the paper-making machines be destroyed.

“Two of the potential owners that I worked directly with have operations throughout the world,” Pallesen said, “and both those companies said everywhere else they operate, what Westrock did with Newberg would have been against the law.”

“This is unfettered capitalism at its best:



**EVERYTHING MUST GO:** Looking to buy a 32-ton pair of natural-gas-powered Voyager steam generators? What about a 1-Ton Coffing Beam Hoist? The new owner of the mothballed Newberg paper mill is selling off all but its paper equipment to make way for new riverfront development.



A company that buys competitors and has no intention of restarting them. They spent over \$288 million to buy that mill, a mill in Ohio, and a Georgia mill, and they closed the Ohio and Newberg mill one week to the day after they became owners.”

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