

Warm Springs Sub-Assembly Plant:

They've Outgrown the Barn

The space age came to Warm Springs eight and a half years ago—to what was once an old dairy barn 30 by 50 feet.

Since it began its operation in 1969, the Warm Springs Sub-Assembly Plant, which assembles electronic components, has grown to the extent that it's experiencing some space problems of its own.

But a solution may be at hand as a result of a yet undetermined amount of money the Tribes will be receiving through a Public Works Grant. The funds are to facilitate the development of the first phase of the Industrial Park which will be located by the fire control offices near Dry Creek. Included in the first phase will be the sub-assembly plant and the tribal garage.

From the outside, the present building is unimpressive, but once inside the visitor is greeted by 14 employees working with a fascinating array of colorful wires, tiny bead-like toroids, and brightly colored paints. The shop takes on the appearance of an art studio or crafts class.

It all started in the late 1960's when a Tribal Council committee approached Tektronics in Portland with the idea of starting up a subplant in Warm Springs. Tektronics was impressed enough with the proposal that, on December 15, 1968, they agreed to a one-year trial of a sub-assembly plant at Warm Springs. And it has been successful.

"We've never had a written contract with Tektronics, just a verbal agreement based on trust," says supervisor Everett Miller. Miller, who has been with the plant since its beginning, stresses that WARM SPRINGS SUB-ASSEMBLY PLANT is the correct name—not Tektronics. "We just contract with Tektronics as well as with other firms."

Things moved swiftly after the agreement was reached. Miller, Maxine McKinley and Adeline Miller went to Portland in January 1969 for four weeks of training to learn how to assemble the components the new plant was to produce.

Upon their return to Warm Springs, five additional ladies were hired and their first shipment went out on February 10, 1969.

Some of the original employees who worked on that first shipment are still there including Maxine McKinley with eight and a half years. Those with eight years at the plant are Marjorie Danzuka, Mary Danzuka, and Margaret Suppah.

Edith Kalama has worked there seven years, JoAnn Moses six years, and Freda Wallulatum has been there four years. Other employees currently are; Linda Allen, Lillian Felix, Edna Johnson, Sharon Miller, Sandra Scott, Venus Strong, and Arlene Tenorio.



The exhaust hose (right) sucks up excess smoke and fumes as Maxine McKinley is tinting leads for better electronic contacts. Maxine is one of the original trainers and has been with the plant 8½ years.

Miller enthusiastically attributes the success of the plant to the ladies saying that they deserve 90 percent of the credit. "They really stuck with it," he says.

By stressing quality, not volume, and because they didn't try to start out big, the plant was soon flourishing. "In our first year we paid for the plant itself, and our second year was total profit," Miller says proudly.

The Warm Springs Sub-Assembly Plant has been most successful in producing oscilloscope components for Tektronics. And this has led them to verbal contracts with other companies as well.

They have assembled cable units for Boeing and worked for North Pacific Products, a Bend toy manufacturer. Their work for North Pacific included assembling the plastic propeller driving mechanisms of rubberband-powered model airplanes, and plastic tails for kites.

Presently the plant is working on 27 different varieties of toroids for Tektronics. Toroids are tiny bead-like things made of an iron substance. Red and gold insulated wire has to be wound on them by hand, after which they are mounted on circuitry boards and used in resistors.

"The work is intricate but the ladies are good at it," says Miller, "because they are used to doing beadwork."

"Though recently we have been concentrating on this project for Tektronics, we are currently in negotiation with a new company," says Miller. "If it works out, it'll be the first time with a written contract for us."

Though they've done well, Miller says the plant has been hurt for the last three years because their facilities are inadequate. "We could have received other contracts if we had a better building," he maintains.

Miller explained that when working with electronics it's important to have a dust proof environment. It is also necessary to have adequate space for storage because the delicate items have to be kept at room temperature.

In addition, they could handle a greater amount and variety of work if they had room for more employees -- and all this depends upon a new building and more space, according to Miller.

But lack of space doesn't keep the friendly folks at the Warm Springs Sub-Assembly Plant from extending the welcome mat to visitors. They're located up by the rehab building and their hours are from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.



Marjorie Danzuka is winding red and gold insulated wire onto the toroids while JoAnn Moses paints the color coating onto the toroids, as is Linda Allen in the background.

(Photos and Text by Sandy Rangila)



Edith Kalama puts the finishing coat on some toroids with a paint brush, then allows them to dry. After two hours, the toroids are popped into the oven for two hours, then all that's left is the packaging for shipment.