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## Coke, city agree to expansion deal

By NOELLE HANER-DORR Staff Writer

ORLANDO — The city of Orlando has a Coke and a smile.

Spurred in part by a \$50,000 economic incentive package, Coca-Cola Enterprises will move forward with an \$8 million expansion of its Orlando bottling and distribution operations in Seaboard Industrial Park.

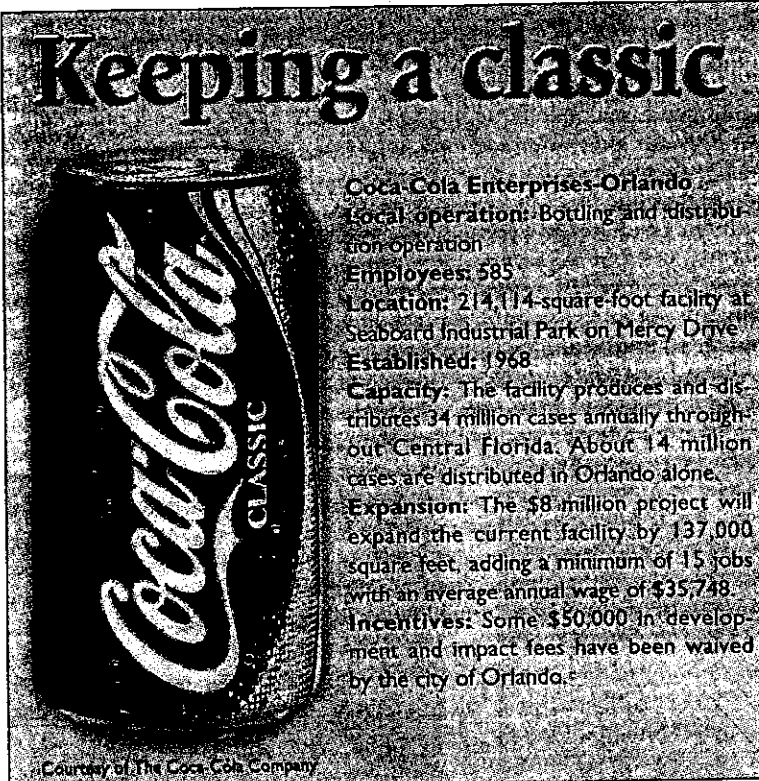
Fifteen new jobs will be created.

The project is designed to help Coca-Cola meet its growing customer demand in Central Florida. The facility produces and distributes 34 million cases of Coke, Diet Coke, Vanilla Coke and Sprite throughout Central Florida.

Some 14 million cases are distributed in Orlando alone.

"Thankfully, we're having a hard time keeping up with demand," says Michele Holcomb, a spokeswoman for Florida Coca-Cola Bottling Co. "We've outgrown the

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**Keeping a classic**

**Coca-Cola Enterprises-Orlando**  
Local operation: Bottling and distribution operation  
Employees: 585  
Location: 214,114-square-foot facility at Seaboard Industrial Park on Mercy Drive  
Established: 1968  
Capacity: The facility produces and distributes 34 million cases annually throughout Central Florida. About 14 million cases are distributed in Orlando alone.  
Expansion: The \$8-million project will expand the current facility by 137,000 square feet, adding a minimum of 15 jobs with an average annual wage of \$35,748.  
Incentives: Some \$50,000 in development and impact fees have been waived by the city of Orlando.

Courtesy of The Coca-Cola Company

# Coca-Cola

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current facility, and we're preparing for future growth."

Orlando did not have a lock on the expanded facility. Several other expansion sites in the southeast, including Tampa also were considered.

However, says Holcomb, "The city of Orlando was very supportive, and we

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like the central location."

The current operation has been housed in Orlando since 1968. Right now, it employs 585 workers in 214,114 square feet in the industrial park.

The expansion will add 137,000 square feet of warehouse space to the existing facility, along with a minimum of 15 new jobs paying an average wage of \$35,748.

That's 115 percent more than the

average wage paid throughout Metro Orlando.

Planned in three phases, construction will begin in December and is scheduled to be complete by November 2004.

Despite the small number of new jobs that will be added, the project is good news for Florida's crippled manufacturing and light industry sectors, say local economists.

"It's not about the size (of these projects) right now. It's about the direction (they're taking manufacturing), and the direction is up," says David Scott, executive director of the Dr. Phillips Institute for the Study of American Business Activity.



David Scott

From July 2000 to December 2002, Florida was among 28 states that lost one out of every 10 manufacturing jobs.

It's been worse for Central Florida manufacturers.

In a 33-month span ending this past April, Central Florida lost one out of every four local manufacturing jobs.

Further, in the year between April 2002 and April 2003, Central Florida lost 3,600 manufacturing jobs, a 7.9 percent contraction rate.

That's double Florida's contraction rate of 3.9 percent.

The drought in manufacturing has the Metro Orlando Economic Development Commission turning its attention toward luring manufacturing jobs

into the area.

The first step was taken earlier this year when the commission helped the Manufacturers Association of Central Florida relocate its headquarters to the commission's office.

Sherry Gutch, business development director for the city of Orlando, says approving the incentive package, which consists of waiving impact fees for the project, was a no-brainer for the city.

"They create high-paying jobs, and we were in competition with another location," says Gutch. "They will be sub-

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mitting plans for a building permit in the next couple of weeks."

Scott applauds the move. "We have more than 900,000 payroll jobs in Central Florida, so there won't be a noticeable difference," he says. "But, it is a symbol to other companies that the local community and its leaders are listening to what is needed around here. Fortunately, local leaders who have access to these incentive packages are doing the right thing."

OBJ staff writer Jill Krueger contributed to this story.