



RobotZone expands into new building



Garrett Palawski, left, and Josh Winter, both of Chanute, ride atop a construction lift inside the building going up for RobotZone east of the Winfield Industrial Park. Both men work for Brown Construction of Chanute. (Dave Seaton/Courier)

By **DAVE SEATON**

Published: Wednesday, November 11, 2009 12:20 PM CST

A home-grown Winfield industry is expanding into a new building.

RobotZone is planning to move into a new, 27,000-square-foot metal building east of the Winfield Industrial Park, according to president Brian Petty.

Petty started the company in the mid-1990s as he was completing his bachelor's degree at Southwestern College.

The new building now under construction will house the company's expanded research and development center and its manufacturing, office and warehouse space.

The company plans to move into the new building from its present home at 620 Industrial St. by Feb. 1, Petty said.

When RobotZone moves, S & Y Industries, its neighbor to the north, will make use of RobotZone's former building.

Sandy Foust, president and chief operating officer of S & Y Industries, said her firm had already acquired the RobotZone building.

The building is temporarily leased back to RobotZone.

The additional space of about 10,000 square feet will house S & Y's engineering and research and development operations, as well as two new manufacturing lines, according to Faust.

S & Y Industries makes circuit boards on a contract basis for industry.

RobotZone designs and makes robotic controls and equipment for a number of markets including hobbyists, the maritime industry and universities.

RobotZone's international business is growing. "We do a tremendous amount of international business," Pettey said. "It's growing constantly."

Universities, especially on the East and West Coasts of the United States, are good customers of RobotZone, according to Pettey. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has several RobotZone products, he said. So does the California Technical Institute (CalTech).

RobotZone's new building is being constructed by Brown Construction of Chanute. Much of the mechanical work and interior finishing is being subcontracted locally, Pettey said.

The project is financed by Intrust Bank of Wichita. Pettey said Intrust had experience with firms like his with a large share of international sales, and that was why RobotZone and Intrust Bank got together.

Foust said the expansion of her firm into the former RobotZone building will eventually add new employees. "I need two new engineers as we speak," she told the Courier.

S & Y Industries currently employs between 70 and 80 people, she said.

RobotZone has five full-time employees. Pettey said he expected that number to increase early next year. He anticipated hiring five more people during 2010.

Pettey said he thought this was a good time to be investing in a new building. In a slow economy, if one is willing to take the step, negotiating with contractors and others is easier. "There's a lot of hungry people out there," he said.

Foust said the timing of her firm's expansion was determined by need and RobotZone's decision to move. The contractor for S & Y's connecting building is expected to be Brian Wells of Arkansas City.