

Weinbrenner Shoe company to expand Merrill operations

Weinbrenner Shoe Company is expanding its operations into an abandoned industrial site with help from the city of Merrill and the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC).

WEDC is supporting Weinbrenner's effort to rehabilitate and occupy the long-dormant facility with a \$250,000 Idle Sites Redevelopment Grant. The city of Merrill is also contributing a \$300,000 development incentive to the project. Company officials say the expansion will create at least 50 new jobs.

The company is looking to scale up its operations in Merrill because demand for American-made products, Weinbrenner's and otherwise, rose 54 percent in 2021, a trend the

company expects to continue.

The 14.2-acre property off Prospect Street belonged to Hurd Window & Doors from 1982 to 2008 before a seven-year vacancy. In 2015, some of the property's older buildings were demolished in an asbestos remediation project and two remained — one was 142,000 square feet and the other was 17,000 square feet.

Merrill Area Development Corporation (MADC) took over the property in 2017 before selling it to Weinbrenner for \$300,000 in March of 2021.

The 142,000-square-foot building will house manufacturing and the other will be used for storage. Renovations include adding new offices

and employee break areas, adding production lines and installing a roof that meets safety codes. Located less than a mile from the company's existing facility, the acquired property will serve as an extension of Weinbrenner's operations in Merrill.

Founded in 1892, the Weinbrenner Shoe Company was initially in Milwaukee before opening factories in Marshfield and Merrill in the 1930s.

The company has been employee-owned since 2000, and is a leading manufacturer of American-made footwear. Weinbrenner produces several brands of work footwear, including its signature Thorogood brand.