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By Bob Zientara

Colorbiotics plant rises on Dayton Avenue

Throughout the winter, between 40 and 50 construction workers have been swarming over the new Colorbiotics plant on Dayton Avenue, just north of the Pizza Ranch.

But that's not the only unusual thing about the 140,000-square-foot building, whose metal skeleton is now being interconnected into a single structure.

Maybe the biggest surprise of all is that the building wasn't even on the drawing board until late May 2007.

By this August, it will be finished, a turnaround time of only 15 months, according to Kent Rotert, Colorbiotics marketing manager and project manager for the new building.

Colorbiotics is one of four units within the Ames-based Becker-Underwood family, Rotert said. It uses formulas developed by Becker-Underwood to make colorants that are added to landscaping mulch, sand, and aggregate.

"Last year, we found out that, for various business reasons, our supply of materials was about to be interrupted," Rotert said Thursday. "We needed to make a decision, and fast."

In consultation with the Ames Chamber of Commerce and the city of Ames, Colorbiotics officials Rotert, Brent Lester, chief operating officer, and Peter Innes, Becker-Underwood chief executive officer, were able to come up with a site, some financial incentives and a plan.

"From the time we first conceived of this to the time we approached our board of directors, it was only five months," Rotert said.

The decision to stay in Ames was important "because many of our customers are on the East Coast, and this operation could well have ended up there," he added.

Story Construction, the general contractor, started moving dirt in August 2007.

"I have photos of the land, which was crops until harvest, then dirt, then dirt moving and then the building," Rotert said. "It's really been fast-tracked."

People started paying attention when the giant, metal beams and supports began rising on the land, he said.

“At first, it looked like there were two smaller buildings under construction, but because we have a large, concrete processing pit for the colorants, that had to be put in first,” Rotert said. “Now, they’re joining the two halves, and people are stopping to ask us, ‘What the heck is going on?’”

A Chamber of Commerce open house is planned in September.

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