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Goya Foods open in PG Distribution center will bring about \$35 million a year to county

BY SUSAN ROBERTSON
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PRINCE GEORGE — There's a little bit of Latin flavor in Southpoint Business Park courtesy of Goya Foods.

Shelves packed full of boxes, cans and bottles line the Hispanic-food company's new Virginia distribution center. The 109,000-square-foot warehouse is Goya's latest step in bringing the Mid-Atlantic and southeastern regions the service company officials say they deserve.

"It's going to allow us to reach the entire state of Virginia as well as North Carolina and South Carolina," said Luis Ramos, general manager of the Virginia facility and a 15-year Goya veteran. "Basically, it will help us give customers here the service they deserve."

Goya found its way to Virginia with the help of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership. The multinational food company purchased 18 acres in Southpoint Business Park off U.S. Route 460 near Interstate 295 last year, investing \$5.1 million in the county.

"We picked Virginia basically for its logistical importance," said Robert Unanue, president of Goya Foods. "Our closest facility was in New Jersey and we spent a while looking at Virginia as a hub to help us reach into the Carolinas and Georgia."

Unanue said they own enough land to expand the warehouse by as much as 140,000 square feet.

Goya Foods was started by Don Prudencio Unanue and his wife Carolina in a small storefront in Lower Manhattan, N.Y., which catered to local Hispanic families by distributing Spanish foods such as olives, olive oil and sardines. The company is still family owned and operated and their commitment to excellence is evident in their credo, "¡Si es Goya...tiene que ser bueno!" — "If it's Goya, it has to be good."

"My grandfather started this company for the immigrants coming to this country," Unanue said. "One of the things we do is welcome people to this country through language and through food and that's a very emotional connection."

Goya offers more than 1,500 food products, spanning a number of cuisines, including Spanish, Dominican, Cuban and Caribbean. In 2004 alone, Goya expanded its offerings

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With 14 distribution centers around the world, 11 of which are stateside, Goya is the largest Hispanic-owned food company in the United States. Unanue said that the company hopes to bring about \$35 million a year to the county along with approximately 100 jobs. They actually began distribution at the plant about three weeks ago and are currently running two shifts of 30 employees.

"Goya's presence not only provides jobs and business opportunities, but also ensures the availability of the best in Latin American cuisine," said Gov. Timothy M. Kaine, who was present at a ribbon-cutting ceremony held yesterday to celebrate the plant's grand opening.

Attendees at the ribbon cutting had the opportunity to sample a variety of Goya foods.

Ramos said that Virginia has really rolled out the welcome wagon for Goya and they are happy to make Virginia their home. In honor of the ribbon cutting, the company donated 5,000 pounds of food to the Prince George County Food Bank.

"This is a historic moment for our company," he said. "We're looking forward to blending in and becoming part of the community."

- Susan Robertson may be reached at 732-3456, ext. 272.

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