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BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS
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NEW COMPANY ON MONTANA'S CROW RESERVATION TO DOUBLE EMPLOYMENT

A new company that began operating only a few months ago on the Crow Indian Reservation near Hardin, Mont., plans doubling its working force in a few months to capitalize on the exceptional skill of Indian employees, the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs reports.

Occupying a $68,000 Indian-owned plant building and aided by a $232,000 loan from the Crow Tribe, the firm makes battery chargers for cordless electric toothbrushes and an electronic device for disinfectant units. A third product -- a battery charger for cordless electric knives -- will be manufactured later this month. By year's end, Indian employees are expected to reach 80, all trained under a contract between the company and the Bureau.

The plant has only one non-Indian employee, the manager. He says that tardiness and absenteeism are lower than in any manufacturing plant with which he had been associated. Under his direction, several Indians are being readied for supervisory postions over jobs that are rated as electrical assembler, mechanical assembler, inspector, and tester.

Varying degrees of skill are required. One item in production involves 19 separate hand operations, assignments in which the patient and careful Crows are particularly adept.

The new industry, U.S. Automatics, Inc., came into being last November through a $300,000 investment by the Crow Tribe. This was approved by the tribal Industrial Development Commission and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The new building occupied by the industry is leased to the company.

At the outset, some Crows were skeptical of the industrial undertaking in view of heavy tribal investment in developing the Big Horn Recreation Area for tourism. This area, near the scene of Custer's Last Stand, is noted for the annual outdoor drama staged by the Crows in reenacting the famous battle against the 7th Cavalry.

On the drawing boards at the Crow Reservation are plans for an industrial park where the new plant building is located. The Economic Development Administration has approved a tribal request for a $241,000 grant for this purpose. The Crows will contribute an additional $60,000 to develop a 40-acre tract with all necessary accommodations, from natural gas to loading and unloading ramps. Construction may start next month.

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