

National Winner

Dotson gets recognition for fire recovery

**Plant back
in full
production
in just over
3 months**

By Tim Krohn
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When Dotson Iron Castings caught fire in late September, the damage was severe. But through a coordinated effort, the plant was back in full production in just a few months and Dotson kept all employees on the payroll throughout the rebuilding.

For those efforts, Dotson has received a national Manufacturing Leadership Award from the Manufacturing Leadership Council.

"It was an extremely quick turnaround. It was pretty impressive," said Matt Schindle, sales and marketing manager at Dotson.

"We didn't lose any customers because of the fire."

The accidental fire at the plant, at 200 West Rock St., caused more than \$5 million in damages.

Three molding lines were lost, along with the conveyor sand delivery

system and all electrical, computer, pneumatic and water lines in the molding and pouring area. Every piece of equipment in the plant had to be serviced due to the soot and residue.

The plant was completely down for about 30 days.

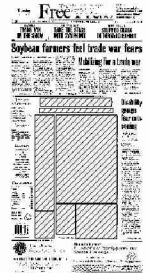
"Then we started back with some levels of production. We didn't get back to normal production until the first of the year," Schindle said.

He said they are still waiting for the arrival of some new molding lines, which are to be installed in May. They're now using rented molding lines.

While the plant was down, the company found partner foundries to help do some of the work to get parts to Dotson customers. "It definitely helped us get through it."

MRCI, which provides employment programs for people with disabilities, and several other local non-profits would be hit by the cut. The Harry Meyering Center, a disability services and support organization, is another among them. Lori Weinberg, executive director at the nonprofit, said the results could be devastating.

"It'll affect the overall ability to maintain and hire staff in the future as well as investing in service enhancements and new



supports to expand individuals opportunities,” she said.

The statewide Best Life Alliance is among the coalitions pushing for a reversal of the cuts. Along with MRCI and the Harry Meyering Center, the group is supported locally by the Southern Minnesota Independent Living Enterprises and Services and LifeWorks Services, among others.

“All we are looking for is for some sense of long-term stability,” said Mike Burke, president of the Minnesota Organization for Habilitation and Rehabilitation, in a news release on the cuts. His organization is a member of the Best Life Alliance as well. “Stability in a system that will allow us to pay our staff competitive wages, which ultimately helps thousands of people with disabilities across the state who rely on our services for their quality of life.”

Advocates from the organizations rallied at the Capitol last month to raise awareness for the potential slash. They’re backing a bill by Rep. Joe Schomacker, R-Luverne, and Sen. Paul Utke, R-Park Rapids, that could alleviate the 7 percent cut and adjust the state’s rate-setting process.

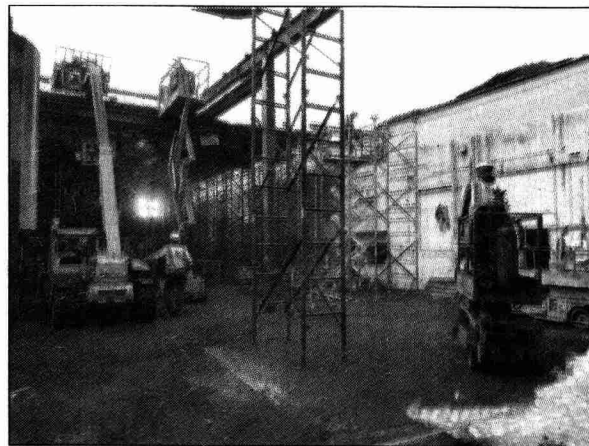
Wedzina said the day at the Capitol was productive, but she’s still unsure the funding will be prioritized this session.

“We had good support from our legislators,” she said. “The problem is this hasn’t take root as a priority this legislative session, and that needs to happen.”

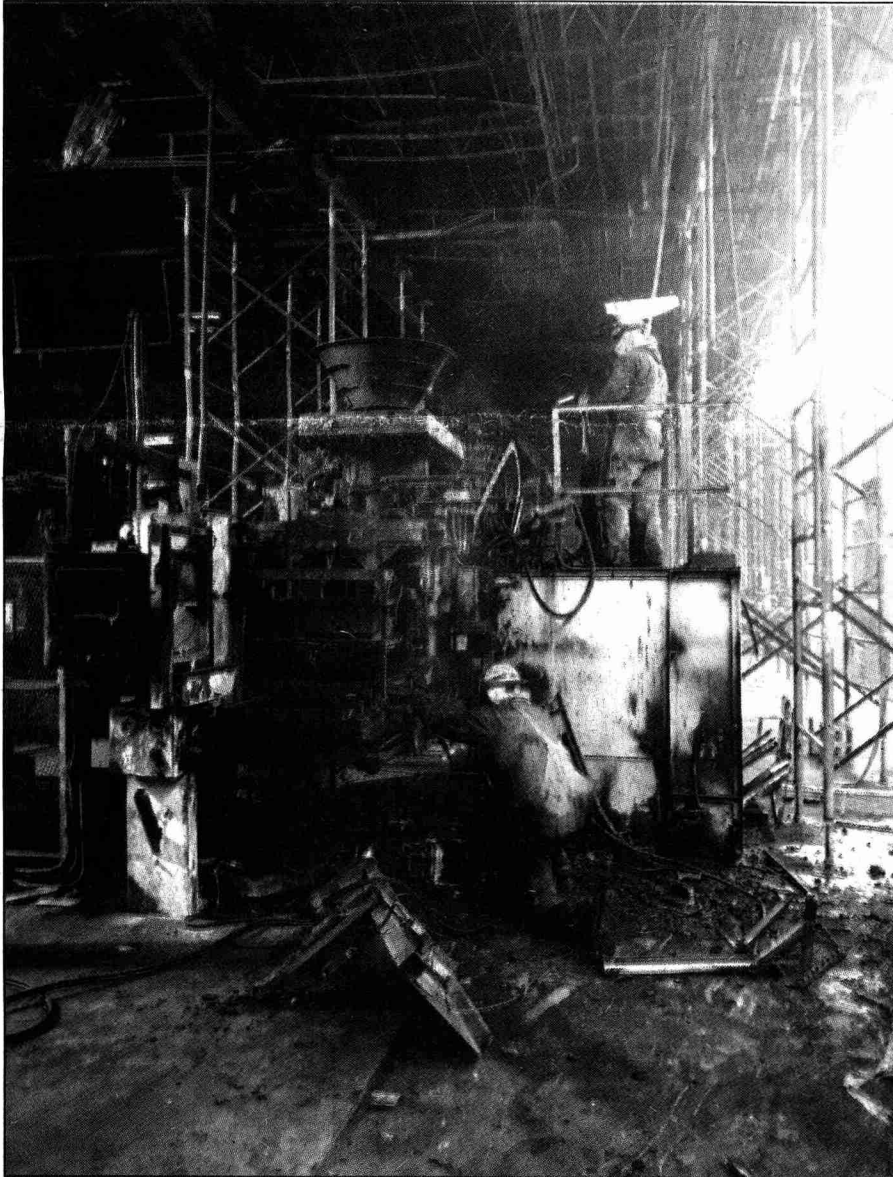
If the cuts take hold in July, about 27 percent of people receiving the funding would be impacted. It would take until the end of 2019 for the rest to feel it.

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MIKE BURKE, PRESIDENT OF THE MINNESOTA ORGANIZATION FOR HABILITATION AND REHABILITATION



Workers put a new roof on part of the fire-damaged Dotson plant late last year. About 40 percent of the roof had to be replaced.



Photos courtesy Dotson

Workers begin repairs to a molding machine at Dotson Iron Castings last year. The plant was hit with a fire at the end of September and was back in full production by the start of this year. They have received a national award for their quick recovery and for keeping employees on throughout the effort.