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Ingenia adding space to Houston plant

Firm putting site in Saudi Arabia

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HOUSTON — Signs of an economic slowdown are nowhere to be found at Ingenia Polymers Corp.

The Houston-based compounder and concentrate maker is completing a \$9 million project that will add 25,000 square feet and 120 million pounds of capacity at its Houston plant.

And if that's not enough, Ingenia will open a 200,000-square-foot plant in Dammam, Saudi Arabia, by mid-2009. That plant will be the first outside of North America for Ingenia, which also operates plants in Brantford, Ontario, and Calgary, Alberta. Earlier this year, a new twin-screw line with 15 million pounds of annual capacity was installed in Brantford.

In Houston, a massive new twin-screw making polyolefin-based carbon-black concentrates will be up and running by midyear, said John Lefas, Ingenia president and chief executive officer, during a recent inter-

view in Houston. Lefas cited growth in technical and high-value-added products such as pipe, wire and cable, geomembranes and film as reasons for the expansion, which will create 15 new jobs.

"I don't think the markets in North American and Europe are dead," he said. "If the dollar stays low for an extended period of time, we might see the revival of North American industry in exports."



Lefas

The Dammam plant will employ 70 and produce Ingenia's standard mix of commodity color and additive concentrates. Lefas said Ingenia has worked with the Saudi government and with the American embassy there on the project.

"Saudi Arabia wants to convert out-of-ground wealth into above-ground wealth," he said. "There are a lot of young people there and they need to

find jobs."

Lefas founded Ingenia, first known as Wedtech Inc., in Brantford in 1986, adding the Calgary plant in 1989 and the Houston site in 2000. Prior to the start, he had spent several years in the Toronto area for Exxon Chemical Co. Lefas had emigrated from Greece to attend college in the 1970s.

"My family had been in business, and I didn't see myself as a bureaucrat," he said of the decision to go it alone.

Today, Ingenia generates about half of its sales from proprietary products and the other half from tolling work that it does for major resin makers.

The privately held firm — owned by Lefas and his wife, Maria — does not disclose sales figures, but Lefas said it posted double-digit sales growth in 2007.

"We just take things one day at a time," he said. "Forward visibility is very limited, but as a private company, we can be counter-cyclical and plan for the long term."