

Norcal, workers, city look ahead

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Plans for the future of Norcal Frozen Food Inc., sketched out yesterday by company officials, are ambitious but, its new president said, realistic.

Norcal president Ron Trine said it will take a lot of effort to build up Norcal and to re-establish the customer base, but predicted Norcal will be on top of the industry within two to four years.

Contrary to his position while employed by the now-defunct Watsonville Canning and Frozen Food Co., Trine said that the 18-month strike against that company was effective.

"It would be foolish to say there was no impact, but the strike was one factor of many that caused the erosion of Watsonville Canning," he said.

The hiring process at Norcal began today at the Walker Street plant, with former Watsonville Canning strikers filling out application forms. All former strikers will return to their jobs in order of seniority, Trine said.

Returning workers will go through orientation meetings in small groups. Part of the new philosophy of Norcal will be reflected in worker committees, which will be depended upon to "self-govern" and advise management about "safety and productivity issues," according to Trine.

One clause of the new contract allows for drug and alcohol testing. Trine said he expects employees will watch over each other in enforcement of that clause. Counseling and



Celebration spilled out of the Veterans Hall yesterday, down Main Street and into Assumption Church.

Kurt Ellison

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rehabilitation programs will be available for all workers and management if a problem should arise, Trine said.

The company will process limited amounts of spinach and broccoli tomorrow as practice runs. Trine said 200 workers should be back on the job Monday with a total of 400 back on line by the end of next week.

Company owner David Gill,

who farms hundreds of acres around King City, will be a prime supplier of product to Norcal. Supplies from other growers will also be needed, Trine said. Growers who previously supplied Watsonville Canning have said they are willing to work with Norcal.

Trine said plans are for Norcal to operate nearly year-round with about 200 employees.

During peak harvest seasons, 700 workers will be employed.

"A strong point will be that the new owner will bring continuity of supply to the plant," said Trine. "By the second year, we will be in a position where the flow is evened out."

For the first three years or so, Trine said full employment at Norcal will be only about two-thirds the size of Watson-

ville Canning, which at its peak employed about 1,000 people.

There will also be a more compact management team with Norcal, Trine said. Although Gill had said early yesterday that Smiley Verduzco, a former executive with Watsonville Canning, was not part of Norcal, Trine maintained that Verduzco will be

kept on as a consultant until the end of March.

When asked why some former management got on with Norcal, while others were dismissed, Trine said:

"Those of us left have been hand-selected by the new owner. We are recognized as professionals with a good attitude who will be able to regroup. This company can

only be successful if we all get the cooperative spirit."

Trine said that he personally "feels committed to the new philosophies of Norcal." One reflection of that is the fact that he invited the press to the plant for a meeting, as opposed to usually being "unavailable for comment" while he was president of Watsonville Canning.