

Salz Leathers finishes up

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By **MIKE DE GIVE**

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SANTA CRUZ — The last foot of leather will roll off the line at Salz Leathers on Friday, marking the end of production for one of the county's oldest businesses.

After 145 years in business, the family-owned leather works announced in August that foreign competition had forced it to close and lay off 111 employees, most of them production workers.

Fifty employees remain at the plant, a mix of production and office staff, said Geoff Eisenberg, Salz's chief executive officer. When production is finished, the company will have two weeks of shipping to complete.

The work force will be scaled back to 15 by mid-November, Eisenberg said. An auction is scheduled for Dec. 4 to sell the company's heavy equipment.

Salz officials have shown the 8-acre property on Highway 9 to several prospective buyers, Eisenberg said. The riverside land is zoned for a variety of general uses, he said. Some environmental cleanup, however, needs to be completed.

The company offered four weeks pay

and insurance coverage, as well as help writing resumes and job search advice.

"A lot of people have found jobs, but I don't know what the statistics are," Eisenberg said.

Forty-five Salz employees are working with county career centers to find new work, said Connie Corbett, manager of the Capitola career center, which is part of Workforce Santa Cruz County.

Production-line workers made as much as \$17 an hour, a wage that will be difficult to match in local jobs with similar skill requirements, labor analysts have said. Overseas workers who do similar work are paid about \$1 an hour, Salz officials have said.

Salz processed animal hides, creating finished leather for everything from handbags to seats for Ford pickups.

The last weeks of production resulted in a reject rate of virtually nothing, a testament to the line employees' work ethic, Eisenberg said. Salz's usual reject rate is a few percent, which Eisenberg said is lower than the industry average.

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