Hytrol renovates its Jonesboro technology center

Hytrol has a new way to show its customers what kind of conveyor systems they are buying. The company spent $1.5 million to renovate its technology center at its Jonesboro facility, Hytrol marketing specialist Dabney Weems told Talk Business & Politics.

The renovations have taken eight months to complete and a dedication ceremony will be held Tuesday (Aug. 28). Because of the renovation, the workforce in the center has doubled, and anywhere from 20 to 30 engineers and other workers are employed there, Director of Research and Development Ben Moyer told Talk Business & Politics.

“This updated Technology Center is a demonstration of our commitment to leading the industry in new technology,” Hytrol President David Peacock said. “This was a significant investment in our future and in Jonesboro, and it is symbolic of our commitment to the industry at large.”

A highlight of the renovation is a client experience studio, featuring an augmented reality environment that Hytrol collaborated with the University of Arkansas at Little Rock George W. Donaghey Emerging Analytics Center to create. The room allows customers to experience their material handling design virtually before it is built or installed.

The virtual reality studio will allow clients to experience how their conveyor system will work before they spend a dime, Moyer said. The goal was to expand the space and allow for existing systems and new systems to be tested in their own space, he said.

The center will also have a two-story testing space that will allow customers to examine how their conveyor systems will operate. The second story will allow for incline tests, Weems said. Hytrol has had ways to let customers test their systems in the past, but nothing like this, she said.

“We didn't have anything of this magnitude. ... It'll be a custom experience,” she said.

The 45,000-square-foot building is located less than a mile from Hytrol's 660,000-square-foot production facility and features a two-level conveyor showcase area for customer demonstrations. Hytrol will also be able to test customer-provided products in the area.

“This experience takes system walk throughs and virtual demonstrations to a new level,” Moyer said. “Unlike traditional virtual reality systems, our cave-in-a-box experience allows multiple people to interact within the environment and requires no headsets. In the future, we plan to use it for maintenance training, digital twin operations and controls optimization.”
Part of the center will be used as a research and development lab. The secure area is solely for new technology, product development and prototype testing. The lab features 10 test bays, a rapid prototyping area and a safety center.

Hytrol has been in business since 1962. When it first opened it had 26 employees. It’s based in Northeast Arkansas. The plant has had nine expansions since it first opened. It completed a $12 million expansion in 2016 when adding 62,000-square-feet to the facility. Peacock previously told Talk Business & Politics his company employs about 1,200 workers.

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