

Thermik leaves Pforzheim

■ Company group fully relocates headquarters to Thüringen.

■ Pforzheim loses almost 100 jobs as a result.

LOTHAR H. NEFF | PFORZHEIM

Pforzheim loses a figure-head: The company Thermik is considered a global market leader in the development and production of thermal protectors for preventing overheating of electrical devices. At the end of August, the company headquarters in Altgefäll in Pforzheim will be closed and the company will be fully relocated to Thüringen. Pforzheim loses almost 100 jobs as a result. The offer to relocate to Thüringen has been accepted by only ten percent of the staff. "It was not a decision against Pforzheim, but a decision in favour of Thüringen", says Marcel P. Hofsaess on the subject of the open opinion-making process that led to the closure of the location. What remains is an empty company site with an imposing research and competence centre that was built just three years ago, for the 40th anniversary of the medium-sized company, and which cost three million euros. And Pforzheim loses one of its largest business tax payers, as Hofsaess comments.

Board carries the decision

The board of the family-owned company made the decision unanimously, confirms the chairman Wolfgang Daum, former head of Sparkasse Pforzheim Calw. Since the foundation of the company in 1968 by Peter Hofsaess, Thermik products have been developed and manufactured in Pforzheim. More than 800 patents and trade mark rights document the innovative force of the company group which now employs 650 employees around the world. The heart of the company will, in future, beat in Sondershausen, around 50 kilometres from Erfurt. Thermik has been represented there since 1990. "My father recognised the large technical potential of the East German site with regard to semi-conductor production", emphasises Hofsaess in conver-



The technology company Thermik Gerätebau gives up the site in Altgefäll in Pforzheim. In the foreground, the new competence centre building.

PHOTO: SEIBEL

Temperature monitors

The company Thermik Gerätebau is a leading light in the development and manufacturing of thermal protectors designed to prevent electrical devices from overheating. The patent-protected products are used mostly in electrical drives, transformers and the commercial vehicle sector. The Pforzheim-based company was founded in 1968 by Peter Hofsaess. In 1992, his son Marcel P. Hofsaess entered the company and has held the role of managing director since 2006. The Thermik group employees more than 650 members of staff in Pforzheim (100), Thüringen (110), USA (15), Romania (120) and Malaysia (320). The turnover was recently valued at 40 million euros.

sation with the Pforzheimer Zeitung. When the wall collapsed, the socialist DDR was in pieces economically, making this a pioneering business achievement. The original 25 Thermik employees became 110, many of them returning from the old Federal States back to their home, explains the company owner.

The ceramic components have since enhanced the classic bi-metal temperature protectors, a Pforzheim speciality. 2.8 billion temperature monitors have already been produced by Thermik. They can be found in fans, household devices, motors and heating units. In theory, every second household contains a



Decision in favour of Thüringen: Thermik boss Marcel Hofsaess, (on the left) with the former Baden-Württemberg Minister President Lothar Späth, moved the company to Thüringen (to Jenoptik) with Marketing assistant Shakiba Tehrani at the "Top 100" awards. The award was given to Thermik just a few weeks ago.

PHOTO: TUECH

thermal protector made by Thermik. The 46 year old company boss was born in Pforzheim and grew up in the town. "My ancestors are buried here." And for this reason, the decision to leave Pforzheim was not an easy one. The reasons for choosing Thüringen were economic, structural and strategic. "We analysed whether it would be possible to integrate Sondershausen at headquarters in Pforzheim." And we also investigated maintaining a holding, the headquarters and development in Pforzheim was also. But in the end, the arguments were in favour of Thüringen, emphasises Hofsaess. The close integration of research

and development with production, short paths, the optimisation of procedures, all this must be combined in a single high-performing location. And sales will also be located there.

Thüringen offers a wide range of motivated potential employees. "The engineering training was more intensive, even under the DDR regime, than it was here. And we desperately need engineer and mechatronic engineers." The proximity to universities and further education institutes in Erfurt and Jena, as well as the now very good infrastructure count as additional benefits for a region which is constantly becoming more internationally recognised. This is compounded by a lack of specialist employees

in Pforzheim which has taken on dramatic levels. Students from Pforzheim tend not to remain in the town, but instead prefer to work for concerns based in Stuttgart and Karlsruhe. "Pforzheim is not succeeding in keeping these people", says Hofsaess. Candidates from outside Pforzheim are difficult to bring to the town, often relocation attempts fail due to family pressures and because spouse and children don't want to move. And unchanged is the fact that even an unemployed person considers a travel distance of 20 kilometres to be "not reasonable".

The fact that serious competitors of Thermik are located in the immediate region – board manager Daum even goes so far as to call it an oligopoly of manufacturers – has resulted in repeated headhunting, combined with the associated loss of knowledge and expertise.

No Chinese involvement

This uncontrolled flow of knowledge was also the reason not to get involved in China. There, state funded infiltration is rife. Marcel P. Hofsaess: "I have not yet found anyone who has been happy producing in China! For this reason, we chose to establish production facilities in Malaysia, in 1992, in order to supply to the Asian market", says Hofsaess. The country has high legal security thanks to the traditional affiliation to the British Commonwealth. In the meantime, the factory in Malaysia has become the cash-cow of the company.

Thermik also maintains additional sites in Sibiu in Romania and New Bern, South Carolina.

COMMENTARY

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A businessman of a different kind

IHK receptions and social events are just as much of a mystery to him as the golf course. "I'd much rather take the dog for a walk in the woods", says Marcel P. Hofsaess. And even when Lothar Späth awards a prize to one of the most innovative medium-sized companies, the outfit of the winner is far from business suit and tie. His résumé is colourful, his family background not always of the simple kind. He left his father's company to set up in competition, and has returned, with great dynamism to lead it into a new dimension. 40 million turnover is the mark of a solid medium-sized company, but the yield is even more impressive: 23 percent plus!

Without a doubt: Behind all this is dedication, tinkering talent and stringent business management. He lives up to the classic attributes of a medium-sized company owner, and you believe him when he says "I feel guilty when I'm not working hard!"

But now the Pforzheim business owner is turning his back on his home town and moving to Thüringen with everything his owns. When he sits there and explains, in his quiet but determined way, to the news people – supported by a PowerPoint presentation – and presenting the hard and soft factors and considerations that led to this far-reaching decision, it is clear that there is no other option. What must be, must be! What remains is a town that has every reason to mourn a top, solid business tax payer, 100 lost jobs and an industrial property that can be considered one of the most valuable in the region.



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