

Connectivity cable operations to end

■ The parent company plans to continue cabinet manufacturing in Omaha.

BY JONATHAN WEGNER
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

In another blow to workers at Omaha's Connectivity Solutions Mfg. Inc., parent company CommScope Inc. announced plans last week to eliminate cable operations here.

CommScope plans to consolidate cable manufacturing operations at plants in North Carolina and overseas. Under the plan, Omaha workers would continue to produce cabinets that house electronic equipment used by telecommunications companies.

The cabinet operations may absorb some of the 185 cable workers, the company said.

CommScope laid off 200 employees in Omaha last November as part of another restructuring plan, shrinking its work force to about 800.

Nearly 8,000 people worked at the plant when Western Electric operated it in 1970.

CommScope also has vacated two of the plant's three buildings.

The company has arranged to sell one building and is in negotiations to sell the second.

The Omaha Planning Board has approved plans to develop an industrial park on the site.

Some employees represented by Local 1974 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers fear that last year's layoffs and the termination of cable operations could put them at a disadvantage when their contract is renegotiated next year.

However, the union president, Bernie Stopak, said he doesn't expect the changes to adversely affect the negotiations.

Company spokeswoman Traci Henry repeated that CommScope bought the plant in 2004 with the intention of keeping it open.

"There are no plans to close the facility at this time," she said.

Stronger demand in the company's cabinet business could offset any job cuts on the cable side, Henry said.

See Connectivity: Page 2

Connectivity: Two of three buildings at Omaha plant vacated

Continued from Page 1

"We have seen growth this year," Henry said of the cabinet business. "What we're trying to identify is if it's sustainable growth."

She said the company will meet soon with cabinet customers to estimate demand for the next several quarters, and she noted that the company expects orders to increase due to Hurricane Katrina.

The company will make decisions about employment after

it gets a better sense of demand, she said.

The union also expects the plant to stay open, Stopak said.

He added that, although the plant has shrunk, it still plays an important role in Omaha's economy.

"(Losing the plant) would have a great impact on the community," he said. "Anytime Omaha loses jobs, it's not a good thing, and these people are paid well."