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Ring Power, Ghana complete multimillion-dollar deal

Premium content from Jacksonville Business Journal by Dave Strupp, Staff Writer

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ST. JOHNS COUNTY -- Caterpillar dealer Ring Power Corp. is completing the final phases of a multimillion dollar contract with the Ministry of Energy in Ghana.

The St. Augustine company supplied and installed a 70 megawatt diesel power plant in the city of Tema, just outside the nation's capital of Accra.

"It's the largest export deal we've ever received," said Michael Turwitt, international sales and export manager for Ring's power systems division.

Though Turwitt cited a company policy to not share the exact dollar amount on the contract, he said it was in the very high, multimillion-dollar range. Ring has more than \$1.3 billion in revenue annually and employs more than 2,500.

The contract, signed in February 2006, came about as officials from Ghana were shopping around Europe and the United States for a company to provide an urgently needed power plant.

The country, mainly powered by hydroelectric power plants, had been in a drought and its reservoirs were running dangerously low, Turwitt said. "They urgently needed a power plant to bridge the time between the drought and when they can get rain again."

Diesel power plants are typically used when energy production is needed quickly, or in the event of an emergency. Realizing the urgency of the situation and the amount of equipment needed, Turwitt said the company was faced with a logistical challenge.

"The government said it needed this power plant immediately, so we had to fly," Turwitt said. "The only way to fly was by using the largest structured aircraft in the world, and the only operators are Russian companies."

With a maximum takeoff weight of 850,000 pounds, the Antonov An-124 Condor moved 5 million pounds of equipment to Ghana. "At one time we had four aircraft in constant rotation," Turwitt said.

The cargo plane holds more than 470,000 pounds of fuel, nearly 14 times the fuel a Boeing 737 passenger airplane can hold. Though the massive aircraft does not frequent Jacksonville's airports, it has been used a few times in the area to transport equipment for the National Guard, and was delivering to Jacksonville as recently as two weeks ago, said Debbie Jones, community relations administrator for the Jacksonville Aviation Authority.

It took 19 aircraft deliveries to Ghana over a year, using Jacksonville International Airport, to deliver the 54 Caterpillar diesel power modules.

The 70 megawatt power plant consists of a 50 megawatt first phase and a 20 megawatt second phase. The first phase was finished in April, and the second phase was completed last month.

"The plant is up and running," Turwitt said. "I am flying there next week to finalize the project."

International market key

This is not the first time Ring has provided equipment to other nations. The company established the power systems division nearly six years ago to develop professional export and international market development activity.

"The international market is key for future growth rates and our success in Africa is the result of many years' hard work and intensive market development," Frank Smith, associate vice president of used equipment, said in a press release.

In its first two years of nurturing the international market, Ring established sales channels in several continents, including Europe, Asia, Australia and Africa.

"We do have projects out in several parts of the world," Turwitt said. "That's what we do here. We are providing these customers with very fast, powerful solutions to energy needs."

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