



## **New firm promises up to 500 jobs at Portage business park**

**By Joyce Russell [joyce.russell@nwi.com](mailto:joyce.russell@nwi.com), (219) 762-1397 | Posted: Thursday, June 23, 2011 4:10 pm**

PORTAGE | One of the world's largest manufacturers of solar inverters will relocate its American headquarters to Portage and promised to create 500 jobs by 2016.

The announcement by officials from Fronius USA was met by applause from about 300 people gathered inside the 400,000-square-foot Randolph building at AmeriPlex at the Port business park. The company has purchased the building and land from Holladay Properties, signaling its commitment to the community it has chosen to call its home.

"If Fronius goes somewhere, we stay there forever," said Wolfgang Niedrist, managing director of sales for Fronius USA.

Niedrist said the Austrian-based, family-owned company chose Indiana for its strong educational system, solid network of suppliers and access to logistical services.

"We searched for the right location, the right state and chose Indiana. We decided to go close to an international airport. They had this building available," Niedrist said.

Thomas Herndler, head of manufacturing for Fronius USA, said the Portage facility is the "biggest investment by the company outside of Austria."

Gov. Mitch Daniels, Mayor Olga Velazquez and others praised the partnership that brought the company to the city.

"I want to thank you for the business," Daniels said. "This is what gets us up in the morning. They chose wisely and well when they chose Portage."

"This is the kind of company we have tried to rebuild the Indiana economy to attract. The whole state will be proud of what happens here," said Daniels, adding the company and state and local officials began negotiating to bring the company's U.S. headquarters and manufacturing facility to Portage about nine months ago.

"This doesn't happen in a vacuum, it doesn't happen in a moment's time," Velazquez said. "We truly are lucky you chose us. Portage and Northwest Indiana residents are ready to demonstrate that we are a loyal, hard-working work force."

The U.S. Department of Energy approved the state of Indiana to provide Fronius USA \$9.5 million in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding to buy equipment for a new facility for the components in August.

"This is huge," Portage Economic Development Corp. Director Bert Cook said. "Very few communities get to experience a development of this magnitude. It is not only for Portage, but for Northwest Indiana."

Cook added that Fronius' commitment will drive additional economic development in the city and region.

Tim Healy, vice president of Holladay Properties, said it was a team effort to bring the company to Portage and that Fronius' commitment marks the largest investment by a single company in the business park.

Herndler said the next step will be to design and construct the interior of the building to meet the company's needs. The plan should be completed by October or November and construction would begin shortly thereafter. The building should be completed by September 2012 and the plant in operation by January 2013.

Fronius will not close its Brighton, Mich., facility. It will remain open as a sales and service center, Niedrist said. About 25 to 30 of its employees will be transferred to the new Portage facility.

Plans are to have 100 employees by next fall and offer a total of 500 new jobs by 2016. Those jobs will range from assembly line workers to high-tech and administrative jobs.

Neither Niedrist nor Herndler would speak about potential salaries.

"Our people are satisfied. At Fronius, the most valuable asset is our employee," Niedrist said.

"Something that impressed me was that they value longevity in their employees, they want their employees to stay," Velazquez said.

Herndler said the company also is union-friendly.

"We have unions in Austria, and we have a good relationship with all of them. We are not afraid to be a union company," Herndler said.

When the company begins hiring, jobs will be posted on its website. The company also will be working with Work One in the search for employees and will hold a job fair when it begins large hiring efforts.