

## Wednesday exhibit will give the history of the New Departure-KBI plant

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Different types of wheel bearings sit in a display case at the former KBI plant in Perkins Township on Wednesday, June 14, 2017. The plant's history is being remembered in an exhibit that can be viewed June 21 in a temporary museum on plant property. -- Register photo/ERIN McLAUGHLIN

PERKINS TWP. — The former KBI plant at Hayes Avenue and Perkins Avenue stands as a silent monument to itself, with about a dozen people left to guard it and deal with remaining tasks. But in its heyday, 4,000 people worked at the bearings manufacturing plant, jamming the parking lot with their cars and powering the local economy.

The plant's history is being remembered in an exhibit of artifacts and papers that can be viewed Wednesday in a temporary museum on plant property. The exhibit was put together by Charles "Chuck" Sage, a longtime plant employee who also served as an unofficial history of the plant and its parent companies. "I started collecting odds and ends probably 15 to 20 years ago," said Sage. "That's how I ended up with a small museum in my office. I've always been kind of a history buff." The "museum" is now on display in the main visitor lobby on the east side of the plant, organized thematically into three areas: Sandusky plant, Hyatt and New Departure.

The Sandusky plant was announced in 1945, while World War II was still going on, and it opened in 1946 as part of the New Departure division of General Motors, explains Sage. New Departure, begun in 1888, and Hyatt, which goes back in 1892, both made bearings. They both joined GM in 1918. Sage collects material from all of those companies.

One fragile document is the time sheet for a New Departure foreman in 1894. It shows that the standard work week at the time was a 10-hour day, six days a week.

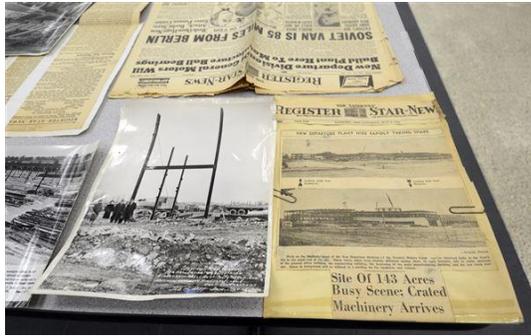
A particularly interesting artifact from the Sandusky plant in a display case looks like a dot. It has to be viewed through a small microscope. "This is one of the smallest bearings ever made in the U.S. This dot is a bearing," Sage said.



Chuck Sage points to a miniature ball bearing that was made in Sandusky. To see the details of the ball bearing, a magnifying glass is used. Sage's collection includes bearings and other parts, including the wheel spindle bearing that was the Sandusky plant's last major product. There are also documents and photographs.

Longtime employees will likely recognize some of the people depicted in photo collages that cover part of one wall. One photo shows a young woman looking at chemistry equipment. A name stitched on her shirt identifies her as "Sherry." That's Sherry Majoy, Sage explained, who developed a standard for steel cleanliness used industry wide.

The Sandusky plant opened as New Departure and operated under a variety of different names, eventually become Delphi and then KBI. It reached its high point in employment in the last 1970s and early 1980s, with about 4,000 people. "We filled that parking lot every shift," Sage said. That included plenty of people handling paperwork chores, along with all of the workers who actually made the parts. "We had 30 people involved in paying the bills every day," he said.



Sage, 63, a Bellevue resident, worked at the plant for 45 years. He was an engineer and then worked as the plant's purchasing manager, retiring in April.

His collection, painstakingly assembled over the years, likely will be scattered soon.

Newspaper clippings and photos show the construction of the New Departure plant in 1946.

The New Departure material will go to the Bristol County Historical Society in Bristol, Conn., which is housed in an old New Departure building, Sage said. The Hyatt collection is still looking for a home. The company hails from New Jersey, but no historical society there has shown interest so far, Sage said.

As for the Sandusky plant material, interest has been shown by the Sandusky Library, which has historic archives and maintains the Follett House history museum. The library has a committee that makes decisions on acquiring historical materials that includes Ron Davidson, archives librarian for Sandusky Library, said Molly Carver, the library's executive director. That panel will make the decision, Carver said. Historical papers are housed in the library's archives, while artifacts are usually kept in the library's Follett House museum. The library is currently searching for a new director for Follett House. The previous director, Maggie Marconi, left to go to work for the Ohio History Connection.

