Crane cuts spark fear for some employees

Dalton mill reduces staff, citing ‘changing demand’

BY AMANDA D *RANE The Berkshire Eagle*

DALTON — Crane Currency has cut back its workforce in recent months in response to shifting demand, the company has confirmed.

Several current employees interviewed for this story said the staff reduction amounted to about 10 percent of the approximately 300-strong staff. Most of the people whose jobs were eliminated took buyouts.

“The company had a very modest reduction to our workforce in Dalton in the fourth quarter to respond to changing demand,” the new ownership said in a statement issued earlier this month. “The majority of the reduction was achieved by associates who chose to participate in a voluntary severance program.”

Several current employees said the historic paper mill that produces the nation’s currency changed since it was sold two years ago. The Crane family owned the mill for centuries before selling it to a Connecticut-based firm by the same name, Crane Co., in January 2018.

At the time of the sale, the company employed about 350 people in the Berkshires.

The company declined to elaborate on the staff reduction beyond the “very modest” descriptor.

Employees who spoke with The Eagle declined to give their names for fear of losing their jobs. They said the cuts began with a three-week furlough over the summer, and then later came the buyouts, which included a week of severance pay per year of service, capped at 26 weeks.

The cuts have left employees fearing for their jobs and wondering about the company’s long-term viability in the era of digital commerce and cash recyclers, which reportedly extend the life cycle of cash in circulation.

Crane Currency, founded in 1801 in Dalton, has sold currency paper to the federal government since 1879 and has been its sole supplier since 1964.

Crane Currency, the sole producer of currency paper for the U.S. government, has made workforce reductions in recent months, responding to what owner Crane Co. referred to as “changing demand.”

EAGLE FILE PHOTO

The cutbacks respond to decreased demand during the current fiscal year, the company said.

The Board of Governors for the Federal Reserve ordered about 5.2 billion notes for the current fiscal year, valued at $146.4 billion, according to the government website. The order amounts to an 18 percent decrease from the previous fiscal year.

The government had amassed unissued inventory from previous years, the print order said, and that fact "explains much of the decrease." Also, the order goes on to say, "policy and technology changes continue to result in fewer notes that are prematurely destroyed."

The company pointed to new technology, like so-called cash recyclers in ATMs, that improved society's ability to detect bills that were unfit for circulation. Before the advent of such technology, more bills were removed from circulation as a precaution, resulting in higher demand for production at the Dalton mill.

And while it might appear at times that bills are going the way of the dinosaurs, the volume of U.S. physical currency in circulation increases year after year, according to Federal Reserve figures.

Amanda Drane can be contacted at adrane@berkshireeagle.com, @amandadrane on Twitter, and 413-496-6296.

Crane Currency, founded in 1801 in Dalton, has sold currency paper to the federal government since 1879. The Crane family owned the paper mill for centuries before selling it to a Connecticut-based firm by the same name, Crane Co., in January 2018.

EAGLE FILE PHOTO