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Mayor signs bill to give Queens business Flying Food Group tax breaks for more jobs



Siegel for News

At a City Hall ceremony, Mayor Michael Bloomberg with (l-r) Richard Werber, director of Greater Jamaica Development Corp., David Cotton, CFO of Flying Food Group and Andrew Manshel, Ex. VP of Greater Jamaica Development Corp.

By Clare Trapasso

The latest economic outlook may be sobering, but good news is on Queens' horizon.

Mayor Bloomberg signed a bill on Thursday granting Flying Food Group a series of tax breaks for agreeing to create more than 150 union jobs at its new Jamaica food processing and packing plant. The bill must still be approved by the state.

"The tax credits are something that is really important to the financial success of the new facility," said David Cotton, the company's chief financial officer. "It gives us the incentive to grow our business and create jobs."

Flying Food, which prepares airline meals, was awarded Regionally Significant Project status for agreeing to hire a minimum of 160 new employees over the next three years.

The company had been looking at consolidating its Queens operation with its Newark, N.J., plant, Cotton said, before the city granted it RSP status. Some of the Queens plant's roughly 500 jobs would have been lost in the move to New Jersey, he said.

That status, if approved by the state, will give the company a \$1,500 tax credit for each full-time employee hired. That could go up to \$3,000 for each military veteran or individual receiving public assistance that the company brings on board, in addition to other tax credits.

Flying Food, headquartered in Chicago and with 17 locations in the U.S., has already invested about \$30 million in renovations for its new plant at Kennedy Airport. The plant opened in June.

Only three other companies in the city - Bronx-Westchester Tempering Corp., Aesthetonics (DBA Remains Lighting) and Bimmy's LLC - have received RSP status.

Richard Werber, director of the business services group at Greater Jamaica Development Corp., said that's because not all companies are eligible for it.

"They need a solid history showing growth," said Werber, who guides companies through the application process on behalf of the city. Companies also need to have a good business plan detailing how they plan to create new jobs, he said.

Werber is now working with Epic Pharma, a pharmaceutical manufacturer in Laurelton that is also applying for RSP status.

Epic Pharma has pledged to create more than 50 union jobs and make upwards of \$2.4 million in capital investments over the next three years if the application is approved, Werber said.

City Councilman Thomas White Jr. (D-Jamaica) said the company is mulling a relocation - possibly out-of-state.

Calls to Epic Pharma were not immediately returned.

"Any business that makes a commitment to expand and provide jobs and job opportunities, we want to give them a fair hearing," said White. "We can't afford to lose one job."