



Guests at Monday's event line up for tours of the new, multi-million dollar mineral sand processing plant.

Southern Ionics' Offerman mill celebrated

By **ROBERT M. WILLIAMS, JR.**
Editor & Publisher

The weather, the mood, the work and years of hopes all came together here Tuesday for a picture-perfect day and a jubilant gathering as two hundred area leaders gathered under a tent to mark the completion of a multi-million dollar sand processing plant in Offerman.

Mississippi-based Southern Ionics, Inc. was host for the occasion as they marked the end of a two-year effort to complete their extensive mining operations in Southeast Georgia. The mineral sand processing (MSP) plant is the capstone and will process thousands of tons of South Georgia sand, extracting valuable minerals to be marketed across the USA and the world. The plant is expected to employ approximately 40 people but will create spin-off economic impact creating more employment throughout the area.

"This is a great match," said former U.S. Congressman and Patterson native, Lindsay Thomas, a consultant to the company. "We have a great community, filled with good, hard-work-

ing people and we have a great company, committed to providing good jobs while they protect our land, our water, our timber and our natural resources."

Those words were echoed often as local, regional and state leaders spoke of Southern Ionic's record for environmental stewardship and quality business.

Southern Ionics CEO Milton Sundbeck praised local and area leaders for helping make the sand plant a reality and for working so diligently to make his company feel welcome.

"Everyone has been so helpful," said Sundbeck. "I particularly want to thank the Pierce County Industrial Authority. They really stepped up to make this investment possible here. They helped with the rail, the roads, tax incentives and much more."

Sundbeck said the Offerman site was the very first one considered by Southern Ionics and a thorough search across five area counties only served to prove that the tract at the intersection of Highway 84 and Zero Bay Road was — by far — the best possible location. He praised

Offerman Mayor Brenda Dennison for her assistance, saying she had "opened city hall up" for us.

"This site has everything we need," said Ron Rose, the company's director of mining: "natural gas, four-lane divided highway, rail access and more."

Southern Ionics two years ago began mining operations in nearby Brantley and Charlton Counties, extracting tons of sand containing minerals such as Zircon, Rutile and Ilmanite. All of those minerals, and more, have long been hard to find in the USA and have been costly for companies to import from around the world.

"We have the finest Zircon coming from right here, the highest quality, to be found anywhere in the world," Sundbeck told the crowd. "Zircon is absolutely necessary to build turbines in jet engines. You can't have jet engines without Zircon and there is none anywhere else in the world as good."

He went on to say he expects a high demand, both domestically and abroad, for Zircon and other minerals, such as Rutile and Ilmanite.

"Our goal is for every

welding rod made in America to be using our Rutile," said Sundbeck. "In the past, they've always had to have it imported."

Ilmanite is a key ingredient in paints. Zircon, Sundbeck noted, is also a key ingredient in "every white ceramic product" you see.

Tim McKeon, a mining engineer, is the new plant's manager. He and his family, he says, recently made their eighth move and have settled in Blackshear where he says he is happy to be working with a plant like this one.

"You might not expect an engineer to be an environmentalist, too, but I am," said McKeon. "There are absolutely no chemicals involved in our production process. It is all natural. We will use size, density and an electrostatic process to separate the minerals from the sand."

The plant is still actually about two weeks away from full completion and then equipment checks will be conducted for several weeks with full production slated for late June.

Following the remarks, the crowd enjoyed a catered lunch and then lined up to take tours of the facility.