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A CRAIN FAMILY BRAND

Take a photo tour of Gotion's $2B battery factory in Manteno

By John Pletz

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MANTENO — It's been two years since Chinese tech giant Gotion announced plans to build a $2 billion factory in this town of about 10,000 residents, just north of Kankakee.

So far the company has built the first five assembly lines inside a 1.5 million-square foot former Kmart warehouse in Manteno.

The Gotion project has been a centerpiece of the Pritzker administration's economic development agenda — and also a flashpoint among some locals who pushed back unsuccessfully on the development, citing concerns over Gotion's

ties to the Chinese government. Now that the plant is operational, however, Crain's took Gotion up on the opportunity to take a look inside.

The factory floor is massive, bright and surprisingly quiet. Robots do the heavy lifting, and much of the configuring, welding and other work required to create batteries used for industrial and home power storage, electric vehicles and EV chargers.

Automated vehicles, which look like industrial-size Roombas, are a constant presence on the factory floor. The assembly line is highly automated. Some workers mind the machines, others interact with them.

The plant currently assembles battery packs from cells that come from Gotion's facilities in China. But Gotion will begin making its own lithium-iron phosphate cells early next year, when EV battery production also is scheduled to begin.

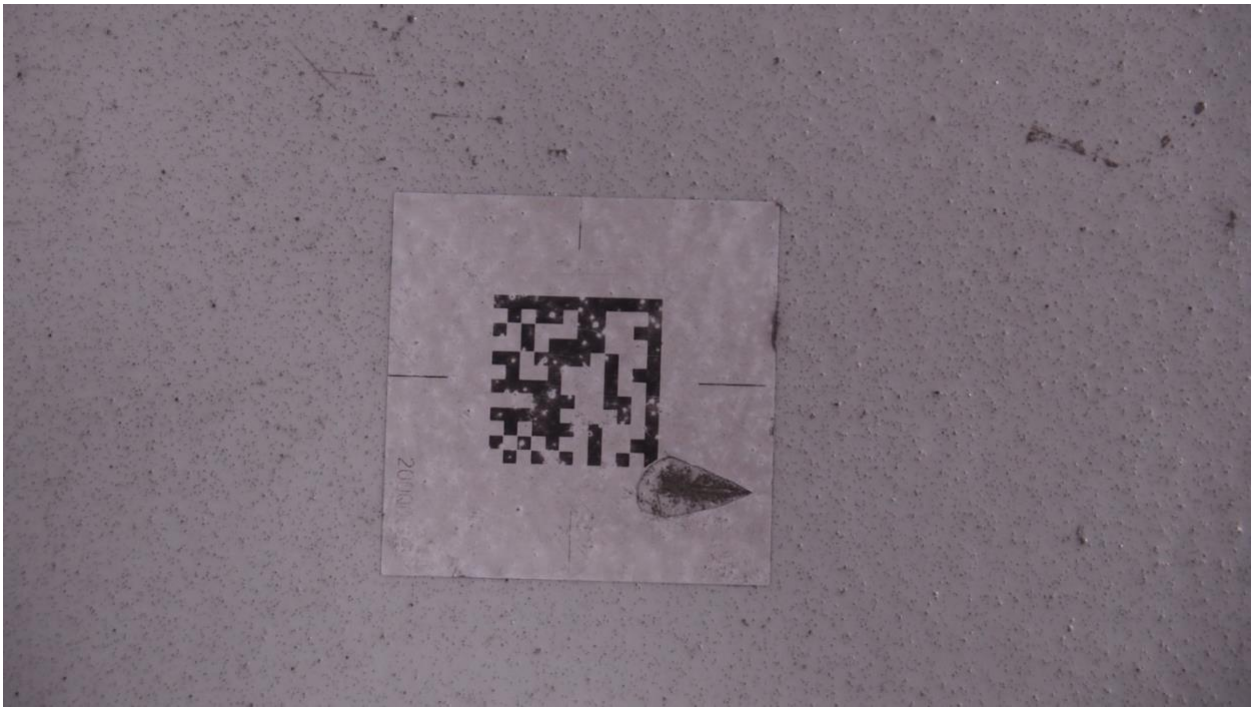
Here's a peek at the operation:

The Manteno factory is modeled on Gotion facilities in China but is more highly automated. The plant employs about 300 people and will grow to 450 workers by the end of the year. Headcount is expected to reach 750 by the end of 2026.

The 1.5 million-square-foot factory once was a Kmart distribution center. Gotion ultimately expects to invest $2 billion and employ 2,600 people.

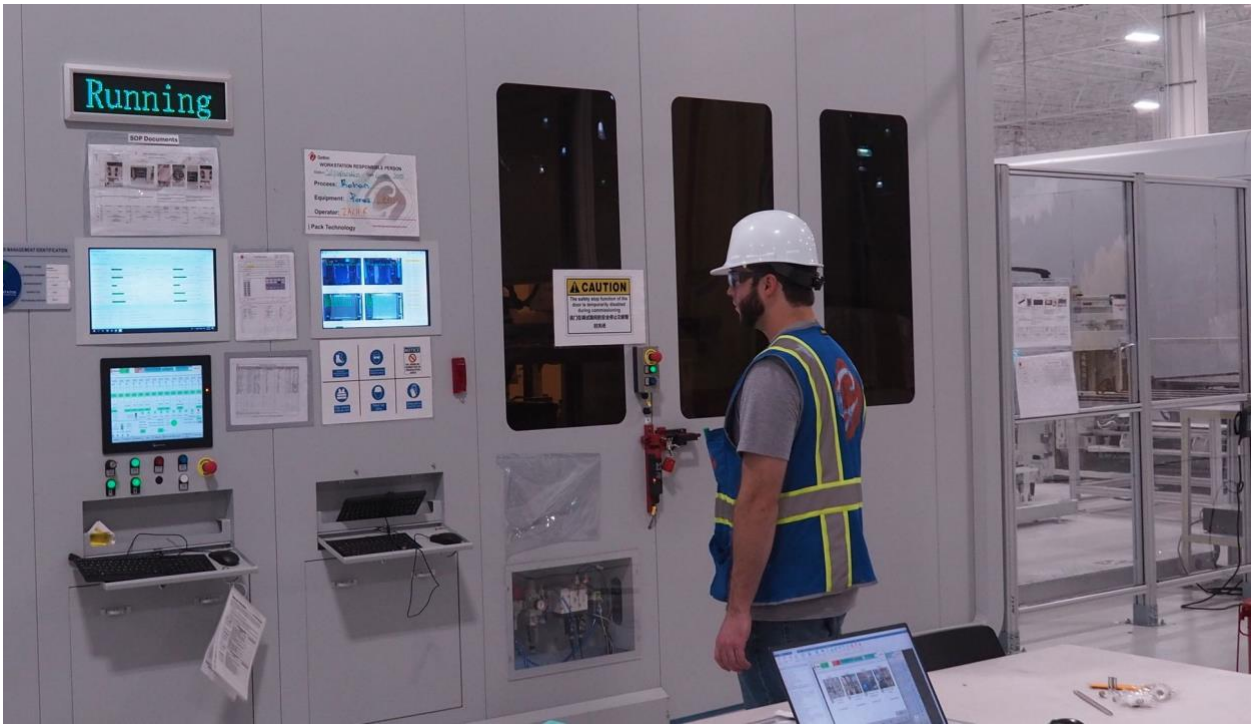
Automated guided vehicles roam the factory, delivering everything from raw materials to finished products.

Large automated guided vehicles like the ones shown above eliminated the need for overhead cranes in the plant.



The vehicles are routed on predetermined paths by QR codes on the floor. Larger units have eliminated the need for overhead cranes.

Individual battery cells are connected and assembled into larger packs that can store and deliver the appropriate amount of power to everything from cars to EV chargers to wind and solar arrays. A robotic welder can produce 52 ring welds in 90 seconds.



Much of the manufacturing process is automated.

Cameras allow operators to see what's happening inside the machines and control the assembly process.

Workers assemble protective covers over battery packs.

Robots give the bolts a final torque.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Do not operate on load

Multiple battery packs are connected vertically, stacked side-by-side and assembled into large cabinets that provide 5 megawatt-hours of power.

Other products include a mobile charger for electric vehicles.

By John Pletz

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