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## Employees return to Mattel plant after time to grieve

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Mattel employees returned to work Tuesday, after plant managers gave workers a day and a half off to grieve with their families.

Mixer-miller Skip Cornelius was among the 175 workers left who came in Tuesday evening. One of the few original Fisher-Price plant workers that were transferred to the Mattel outdoor play equipment plant, he said he spent the time facing the prospect of finding another job at the age of 48.

He said he had not been able to talk with his co-workers about the closing, but remembers their reactions vividly when the final word was given.

"I know our local management team is quite upset," he said. "You can see it in their eyes. You're never ready for something like this. With no notice."

Cornelius said employees and laid-off employees suspected a change may be occurring when laid-off employees received a letter on Monday for a meeting. No one suspect, though, the plant would close.

"Another round of lay-offs, you wouldn't call people in," he said. "I think they (Mattel Inc.) were planning this. I honestly don't believe they wanted us to work. We were a decoy to upset Little Tykes."

Mattel recently acquired Tyco Toys Inc., a rival in outdoor play equipment and the maker of Little Tykes toys for toddlers. The deal was completed for \$755 million. Sean Fitzgerald, Mattel vice president of corporate communications, told The Journal-Register at that time it was "unlikely" any Medina jobs would be lost as a result of the acquisition.

"I can't say enough for our local management team," Cornelius said, crediting them with keeping the plant open for so long. "Our corporate managers, I can't say enough good about them."

Various programs have been put into place to assist Mattel employees, including the Orleans County Rapid Response Task Force. Inside the main entrance notices have been posted to direct employees to these services, along with a smaller poster to collect recipes to form a plant cookbook. Cornelius said he knows employees who have already taken advantage of these services and plans to use them himself. It doesn't make the shut-down any easier, he said.

"How can they make it any easier?" he asked. "You walk in one day and they say your health insurance is stopped, your income is stopped. They give you a little severance pay and send you on your way."

This group of employees became tightly-knit in the last two years, he said. They wanted the plant to succeed. Last year, employees reached a 99 percent schedule attainment record and earned Mattel's Worldwide Excellence Award.

"If we were a small company, I bet we would still exist," Cornelius said. "I think if Mattel had been more supportive and put the money into advertising we would have made it. The local management group did (support the plant). They worked hard to keep us running. But they can only do what the mothership says."

The plant produces large children's toys by a process known as roto-molding. Cornelius said it is one of the least expensive ways to mold plastic.

"if somebody was smart and bought us and kept these people, they could roto-mold anything in the world they wanted to," Cornelius said.

There will be fond memories of the former Fisher-Prices plant for employees, Cornelius said. There was a sense of family that Fisher-Price was known for.

"Fisher-Price started it out as a family and treated you like one," he said. "Somehow, it got lost."