

## AKG grand opening draws crowd



Laura Wehde/Republic

Christiane Pietzcker, left, AKG Senior Consultant Dieter Reichel, center, and Gov. Mike Rounds, right, visit during the grand opening and ribbon-cutting ceremony at AKG Midwest, Inc., Wednesday morning. More than 200 people attended the event.

## Rounds thanks company for confidence in Mitchell, state

By KORRIE WENZEL  
The Daily Republic

Forging strong relationships and watching them grow was the theme of the day at the grand opening of the AKG Midwest, Inc., plant Wednesday in Mitchell.

Gov. Mike Rounds, speaking before a crowd of approximately 225, said the opportunities are numerous for the German company, as well as for Mitchell and South Dakota.

"We look forward to a relationship that will grow and an opportunity for our young men and women to stay here and work in the state," said Rounds, one of nine people

who spoke during the ceremony.

Rounds, speaking directly to high-level managers of the company, said, "I want to say thank you for having the confidence in the citizens of Mitchell and the surrounding area. We are committed to you to do everything we can to help you be successful."

Less than a year ago, many of the same people stood in an open field just south of Interstate 90 for a groundbreaking ceremony, after AKG announced it would begin construction of its new Midwestern plant. The company — which produces custom-designed air-cooled heat exchangers for

radiators and coolers for air, fuel and oil — chose Mitchell because many of its customers are in the Midwest, the plant is located just off I-90 and because of South Dakota's work ethic, according to past reports. Officials from the company have said the local plant eventually could employ as many as 150 people.

During Wednesday's grand opening — which also included a band and a banquet — dignitaries partook in traditional events, such as a posed ribbon-cutting with oversized scissors. They also waxed optimistic about what the plant means to Mitchell, a

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city that has shown unprecedented industrial growth in recent years but also last month suffered the loss of nearly 300 jobs when Dakota Pork Industries closed down.

Pleasantries were exchanged in both English and German, highlighted by a slow, broken-German speech from Pat Essig, president of the Mitchell Area Development Corporation, who remarked on his German ancestry.

In closing, he said, "We share your pride in this investment ... and look forward to a long and prosperous future in this community."

Essig ended the address by joking that he hoped that was what he said, drawing laughter from the crowd.

The dual-language speech from

Essig was typical of the atmosphere; speakers not only lauded the future, but some commented on the past.

Rounds said "the future is bright. Let's stay the course."

"There is friendship between Germany and America," he said. "Let's make it grow."

Dieter Reichel, senior consultant for AKG Group and emcee of the event, told the crowd how, as a child, he received chewing gum and other sweets from American soldiers at the end of World War II.

Hartwig Pietzcker, AKG's owner, president and chairman of the board, was one of the last to speak.

"We are very glad to start cooler production in this wonderful new plant today," he said. "Hopefully, we will succeed in utilizing the plant here in Mitchell to capacity soon and when this is achieved, in keeping it growing. We are confident that this plant — like all plants of the AKG group —

will do successful business and be financially independent soon. We feel comfortable here in South Dakota and we believe that we have found the right partners. We have great confidence in your country and its people, and we cherish the hope that cooperation will continue to be as good as it has been up until now."

AKG was formed in 1919 as a firm that mostly made and repaired coolers for cars. Over the past 30 years, production has increased more than tenfold and there now are 11 plants worldwide.

Others who spoke Wednesday at the ceremony were Mayor Alice Claggett, AKG Vice President/Managing Director Bodo Marquardt, and Melanie Hunhoff, Benjamin Ready and Mark Gerhardt, representing Sen. Tim Johnson, D-S.D.; Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., and Rep. Stephanie Herseth, D-S.D., respectively.