

Global trend spurs local expansion

BY NICK WOOD
ACTING EDITOR

GREEN BAY — After the dignitaries had set down their silver shovels and dispersed into the crowd gathered Monday for the groundbreaking of Carnivore Meat Company's new \$55 million world headquarters in the I-43 Industrial Park, Josie, a Basenji-mix rescue dog, hopped up on the ceremonial pile of dirt and started digging.

With an under-roof footprint of 235,000 square feet — roughly four football fields — expected to be producing dog food for local and international markets by Fall of 2023, Carnivore CEO Lanny Viegut's dog appeared eager to keep things moving.

The current farm field on the city's far east side at the end of Finger Road will be the site of a 28-acre campus for the home-grown manufacturer of premium freeze-dried and frozen raw pet food.

When it's completed, dogs like Josie will be welcome.



Carnivore Meat Company CEO Lanny Viegut said the number one reason his company chose to build its world headquarters in Green Bay is the quality of the work force. **Nick Wood Photos**

In addition to the manufacturing space and 150 new jobs, the new building will include 27,000 square feet of office space built with sustainability and pets in mind.

The facility will have a dog run, dog wash stations and other pet amenities.

"Part of growing as a

company includes creating an environment people want to work in," Viegut said. "We have always had a pet-friendly culture, and this new facility will enhance that offering, making work an accessible place not only for our team members but also their four-legged companions."

Local roots

Founded in 2012 by Viegut, Carnivore has grown from 30 employees working in a 6,000-square-foot warehouse space to an international exporter employing more than 200 people at four production sites around Green Bay.

The new facility will be the fifth, and Viegut expects the other four to remain in operation.

The company's Vital Essentials, Vital Cat and Nature's Advantage brands are part of a fast-growing trend in the pet food industry of feeding pets a raw diet that mimics the prey they would naturally eat.

"It's different from your traditional kibble that you might find in a grocery store," Viegut said. "What we try to do is reassemble the prey that a dog or cat in the wild would eat."

Among the meats used are traditional protein sources like beef, chicken and salmon, plus a range of

not-so-traditional sources like duck, rabbit, whitefish — and even minnows.

All are processed by Carnivore's proprietary, in-house-designed and custom-built freeze dryers.

And unlike most commercial pet foods, Carnivore adds no fillers or grains.

"The chief difference between what we do and the grocery store food is really the (elimination of) carbohydrates. When you put together the meat, the organs and all the bone products and make a diet, it's virtually identical to what they would eat in their natural habitat," Viegut said.

The raw product is sourced from all over the country, including regional and local vendors, Viegut said.

Carnivore has been awarded the Wisconsin Manufacturer of the Year Award, the Governor's Export Achievement Award, and was recently named by Mayor Eric Genrich during his State of the City address as Green Bay's Business of the Year.

Both Viegut and Genrich attributed much of Carnivore's success — and the decision to build its world headquarters here rather than moving to Chicago or some larger metro — to the quality of the workforce in Green Bay and the region.

"We chose to stick around here in Green Bay for a couple reasons," Viegut said. "Number one, the work ethic of the people here in Wisconsin is unmatched. They care, they show up every day, and they're proud of what they do."



Among the freeze-dried pet treats sold under the Vital Essentials brand are turkey giblets, chicken breast, chicken hearts, beef tripe and even minnows.

Vital Essentials branded products are now available in more than 5,000 independent pet food stores around the United States and worldwide in 14 countries.

Locally, it's available at several area veterinarians and pet day care centers and from online sources including Chewy.com.

For its consistent double-digit year over year growth,

Financial backing

To finance the project, Carnivore partnered with Arbor Investments, a Chicago-based private equity firm specializing in acquiring private companies in the food and beverage industries.

Arbor President Carl Allegretti said the last few years Arbor has focused on the pet food industry in particular because it has been booming, thanks in part to the pandemic.

Allegretti said beyond the fast-growing niche, what attracted them to Carnivore was the culture that Viegut and his team have built.

"Let me start right at the top — Lanny," Allegretti said. "We like investing in winning teams, and when you talk to Lanny and you walk the plant with him and his team, everyone knew who Lanny and Brett were, and they knew everybody's name, which was really impressive. I believe a winning culture starts with the employees, and this is a winning team up here in Green Bay, to go with your football team."

Anchor tenant

For its part, the city sees Carnivore's campus as a key anchor tenant for the newly expanded Grandview Industrial Park which will stretch from Grandview Road east to the city limits.

The stub of Finger Road, just east of Woodside Golf Club, will be renamed Vital Place, in tribute to the company's flagship brand of dog and cat food.

Neil Stechschulte, development director for the city, said any time you have a local employer expanding, it's great for the local economy,



Josie, the Carnivore Meats mascot, does her part to help out during the groundbreaking ceremony.

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but this particular sector is a good fit in terms of a fast-growing global pet food trend aligning with one of Green Bay's core industries of meat processing.

"I think it's more of a nationwide, even an international trend, so obviously having these guys at the forefront of it and making their global headquarters here, we couldn't be more excited," Stechschulte said.

He said the city hopes Carnivore will be a catalyst that spurs future development in the park.

"Hopefully this is the first of many things to come," Stechschulte said. "We're excited about Carnivore being here, but we're really excited about what could come afterwards. Hopefully this is the beginning of a



This is a digital rendering of Carnivore Meat Company's \$55 million, 235,000-square-foot world headquarters in the east end of the I-43 Industrial Park. Production is expected to begin late next year.

Contributed Rendering

nice new industrial park with 10, 20, 30 new businesses. Once we get this one moving, we're going to be

looking at some opportunities to grow this park even more aggressively."

He said they've already

had inquiries on available properties from businesses who are either customers of or suppliers to Carni-

vore, and those types of businesses will be the first round of potential tenants they reach out to.

"Obviously with a facility of this size, they're going to attract the attention of some of the people they work with regularly," he said. "Those would be low-hanging fruit if we could get those folks to build their facility right next to (Carnivore)."

The city is in the process of creating a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District with a public hearing that was held Tuesday.

Stechschulte said neighbors had expressed concerns about potential noises and odors from the new plant, but said he felt the company had addressed those concerns with routing of trucks and a sufficient buffer between the plant and neighbors.

"We're confident there shouldn't be too much of an issue," he said.



Carnivore Meat Co. CEO Lanny Viegut and Green Bay Mayor Eric Genrich hold up a new street sign which will soon replace the far eastern stub of Finger Road north of Grandview Drive.



Carnivore Meat Company CEO Lanny Viegut told the crowd gathered for the groundbreaking of the pet food maker's 235,000-square-foot world headquarters in the I-43 Industrial Park on Green Bay's far east side that they plan to add 150 jobs once the facility opens its doors late next year.

Nick Wood Photos

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