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## Kandu Industries plans to fill Blackhawk Tech Milton space in 2024

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MILTON—Milton will lose a satellite campus of Blackhawk Technical College that's been at 15 Plumb St. for nearly a decade, but there won't be a void at the facility for long, if at all.

Janesville-based nonprofit service

agency Kandu Industries said it bought the 110,000 square-foot building on Milton's east side in a press release issued Monday. The site currently houses Blackhawk Tech's Advanced Manufacturing Training Center.

Kandu offers dayside programs and services and employment for Rock

County residents with disabilities. The group announced Monday it intends by early 2024 to move out of multiple facilities it operates in Janesville and relocate under one roof at 15 Plumb St. in Milton.

Financial details haven't been made public, but Kandu Executive Director Kathy Hansen said Kandu closed on

purchase of the property last week.

The sale—which as of Monday has not been formally announced by Blackhawk Tech, will give Kandu about 30,000 additional square feet of building space to grow its adult day service and memory care programs and its

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light manufacturing production division, Hansen said.

"This has been more than a year in the works, and it's been part of our strategic plan," she said. "The board of directors knew we had to increase several of our program areas to be able to accommodate all our Rock County. Right now, we're split up between smaller facilities on Barberry Drive and Adele Street (in Janesville). We really wanted to be all under one roof for efficiency. We'll be able to save money that way."

Blackhawk Tech has leased the Plumb Street facility since 2014. The site once housed a manufacturing site for compressed natural gas vehicle fueling systems. Under an agreement, the technical college's foundation, the building's former owner, will continue to lease the Milton facility for a period of time, Hansen said.

Kandu would move its programs into spaces at the Plumb Street location in early 2024, although it's likely Kandu's operations and some of Blackhawk Tech's



COURTESY OF KANDU INDUSTRIES

The main entrance at Blackhawk Advanced Manufacturing Training Center in Milton. The 110,000-square-foot building at 15 Plumb Street sold last week to Kandu Industries, a Janesville nonprofit that serves people with disabilities. Kandu plans to move all its services from Janesville to the Plumb Street facility.

operations could overlap at the Milton location for a period of months while a lease arrangement continues, according to Hansen.

"There's going to be a little bit of wiggle room there, and there's a phasing process," she said. "We're not exactly sure when that's going to be, so they (Blackhawk Tech) have leased the building from us for right now."

Blackhawk Tech Marketing Director Liz Paulsen confirmed the sale of the property and a lease-back arrangement. Blackhawk Tech intends to replace the

educational space it's vacating in Milton in some facet, but Paulsen said the college was withholding further details pending discussion by the technical college's board.

Blackhawk Tech already is in the process of building out a new police training and education facility at its main campus on County G, in addition to newly completed interior upgrades at the main campus.

Milton officials have been aware of the planned sale and transition, said Milton City Administrator Al Hulick. The number of people

who'd use the facility under Kandu's operations would be similar to the use it now sees as a satellite campus with training center for welding and other manufacturing skills, Hulick said.

Kandu for the last two years has reshaped its mission and sold off some real estate in Janesville, including the former Armory in downtown Janesville, and the Pontiac Convention Center, where it had run its hospitality operations, including Best Events, an event catering arm that Kandu had operated until the COVID-19 pandemic all but idled the

hospitality sector.

Kandu since has absorbed it catering arm and downsized into a smaller, boutique rental and catering company that now employs about 10 people. The catering arm would operate out of new commercial kitchen space at the Plumb Street location, which Kandu plans to build out as part of renovations to the Milton location, Hansens said.

Kandu's catering arm makes meals for its own clients as well as Meals on Wheels and catered lunches for smaller-scale daytime events, Hansen said..

The nonprofit plans to launch a capital campaign to pay for the Plumb Street purchase and offset the cost of renovations to some of the space, Hansen said.

A revamp at the Plumb Street location would give Kandu as many as eight classrooms — more than twice the number of classrooms the agency has at its current location. Along with plans to grow its in-house production work "by 20%," Kandu officials hope the new space in Milton would help it grow its adult day services and

memory care to eventually serve up to 80 clients, Hansen said.

Many of Kandu's day service clients are older adults with memory and neurodegenerative disorders such as dementia, a growing demographic in Rock County, Hansen said.

Clients will notice a change in their surroundings.

"Our day services right now is set up in the center of a building," she said. "These are people with Alzheimer's and dementia, and some have developmental disabilities, and there's no windows in the building. In the Milton building, there isn't a room you can walk in that doesn't have windows, and it's beautiful. It's all new, the paints, the flooring, everything is bright. It's just going to be a way better environment for our clients."

Kandu serves clients all over Rock County. Its move to Milton would mean that some Kandu clients would have a longer commute. Kandu plans to cover charter transportation or launch its own dedicated ride service to and from Milton, Hansen said.