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## **Kalama glass plant almost ready to roll**

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KALAMA — The orange gobs of molten glass zip into the bottle molds at the Cameron Family Glass Packaging plant like fire from a machine gun. At 2,100 degrees Fahrenheit, the gobs need to be fluid enough to form inside the wine bottle molds at the ground floor.

Once the bottles leave the mold, they're still glowing orange, but the temperature has dropped to a mere 900 degrees.

Next, the bottles — 230 a minute — are heated up one more time on conveyor belt in a device called an annealinglehr, which keeps all the glass at the same temperature before cooling each bottle to prepare for inspection and packaging.

"That's all this is — a giant pizza oven. It heats it up then cools it down," said Jeff Dean, a superintendent with JH Kelly, the Longview construction firm building the plant at the Port of Kalama.

The new, \$80 million bottle factory is bringing some heat to an otherwise chilly local economy.

"This is really the best part of our economic picture right now," said Ted Sprague, president of the Cowlitz Economic Development Council.

JH Kelly is completing the final testing of the bottle making before turning over the keys to Cameron Glass by the end of the year. All bottles made before the changeover are being recycled, said Chris Bankhead, a JH Kelly field engineer.

Cameron Glass has already begun hiring, and the company expects to have 80 family-wage jobs once the plant is fully operational.

Most glass plants are gas-powered, which usually require more environmental safeguards and cleanup. On the other hand, Cameron Glass is billed as the world's largest glass bottle electric melter, aided by the promise of cheap power in Washington state.

"That's what makes this place green," Bankhead said.

Each bottle machine will produce 230 bottles per minute, which adds up to 144 million bottles per year for wineries in the Pacific Northwest and beyond.

The startup of Cameron Glass comes at a dour economic time in Cowlitz County. Unemployment remains the highest in the state. Longview Fibre Paper & Packaging Monday is scheduled to start a six-week rolling shutdowns of its five paper machines, and the Longview branches of Tri-County Truss and Puget Sound Truck Lines closed recently.

However, Cameron Glass can benefit from a labor pool long on experience in manufacturing, Sprague said.

"They're fortunate in the pool of people they're getting to choose from," Sprague said.