

# Buses to begin rolling off assembly line at Dunkirk plant

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**Factory floor**

Brian Barrington, president of Pegasus Specialty Vehicles, stands in the doorway of what will become a tool crib in the currently vacant factory floor for his new Dunkirk business. He will start work on assembling school buses in the next three to four weeks.

*Times photo/Tim Thomas*

By TIM THOMAS

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**DUNKIRK** — New school buses soon will be rolling out of a former plastics factory in Dunkirk.

Brian Barrington, who has a lengthy family background in the business of assembling buses, has opened Pegasus Specialty Vehicles in the former Diamond Plastics/Hedstrom building on Geneva Street (Ohio 81) in the village.

The business officially has been open three weeks and Barrington said word is starting to get around the village about his plans.

Right now Barrington and his small crew are busy cleaning out the shop floor, with one last piece of equipment from the old factory to be removed soon.

He says they have the plant laid out and will start putting in work benches and power plugs where needed. That will be followed by the installation of a paint booth so the bus assembly can begin.

Barrington, who is the company president, said they hope to start building test bodies for buses within the next three to four weeks. Once all the bugs are worked out, they should be turning out a new bus every six to eight weeks, he said.

The buses will be for both public and private schools, day cares, senior centers, Head Start programs and anyone else who needs one, Barrington said. At the outset, Pegasus will be building buses for nine to 48 passengers, but in the future it will be able to go bigger.

He is very optimistic about the success of the business.

“The market’s right ... we’re not pigeon-holing ourselves into one power train.”

Diesel is still the predominant fuel choice for buses, with propane an option as well. But gas-fueled buses are becoming more popular because of government regulations involving diesel, Barrington said.

Most of the chassis will be ordered from GM and Ford, but for those wanting electric, those will come from Zeus Electric Chassis in Minnesota.

He said within 10 to 15 years electric will be a bigger factor, but right now it has too many limitations. An electric charge will provide a range of 110 to 120 miles for a bus. While that may work in urban areas, it’s not feasible for places out West where some of the routes are 250 miles.

Assembling buses is in Barrington’s blood. Growing up in Lima, his father worked at Superior Coach, which at the time was among the largest assemblers of buses. When it closed in 1981, Barrington’s dad and some friends bought the van conversion section of the building. They created Mid Bus and began turning out their own buses.

Barrington said he worked with his dad’s business through the summers while in school. He graduated from Ohio Northern University with degrees in management and sports management, then continued with Mid Bus for another 5 to 6 years before it closed. Most recently he worked with Titan Bus in Ottawa.

It was about two years ago that Barrington started considering opening his own bus assembly business. There was a lot of change in the market with the consolidation of manufacturers, something that really sped up in the past year.

He initially talked to an equity company in Columbus a couple years ago. “They called me in December and wanted to know if I could build electric buses. I told them I could build electric buses, just not all the time because there’s not a market for them,” Barrington said. “So we’re going to be a little bit of everything – gas, diesel, propane and electric.”

Now he needed to find a suitable building with the necessary ceiling height and parking. He initially looked in Lima, but lease payments were high. So how did he find the building in Dunkirk? “I Googled it,” he said.

Barrington said he drove to the building site, called the owner and worked out a lease payment. The drive from his home in Waynesfield is a little shorter than the trip he used to make to Ottawa.

Barrington said all the guys helping him to start Pegasus have worked together before, either in Lima or Ottawa.

Before the first bus rolls off the assembly line in Dunkirk, Barrington said he has between 150 and 200 orders for buses from coast to coast and into Canada. He said because of product consolidation some of the dealers are worried about not having product to sell.

"They were clamoring for somebody new," Barrington said.

Pegasus doesn't require a lot of heavy duty equipment to get up and running, just mainly hand tools. Local companies will be used for fabrication needs. Barrington said the parts will be sent to the Dunkirk factory, where the body will be put together and set on the chassis. It will be sent on down the line for finishing work and off to the paint shop. The new bus then will be ready for pickup.

"We'll basically be an assembly shop," he said.

Barrington said within six months he expects to have 15 to 20 employees, with that growing to 25 to 30 by the end of the first year. He believes employment will grow to close to 60 within two to three years when Pegasus is up to full speed and producing 700 to 800 vehicles a year.

He noted it is called Pegasus Specialty Vehicles because one of the equity guys works with other industries that need roll-offs and water trucks for oil. "So we'll have the ability to do some of that in the Zeus chassis," Barrington said.

The bus assembly industry is very unique, he said, noting with the 50 states there are 50 different state specifications for buses.

"So every vehicle is essentially different," Barrington said.

"It's our job to provide the options to meet the specifications. It's the dealer's job to make sure what they order meets the state's specifications," he said.

Barrington said Ohio has some different specifications for buses.

"Ohio has the word 'STOP' in 10-inch letters on the back of the bus. No other state has that," he said. "The dome lights come on when you open the rear door – that's only Ohio."