**Essential Hartselle Business Works Through COVID-19 Challenges**

**Hartselle, AL (April 3, 2020) —** As the coronavirus pandemic delivers a wave of anxiety and uncertainty upon our community and the world, the outbreak is resurrecting a community spirit and camaraderie that has defined this region’s citizens and workforce throughout its history. In addition to today’s fearless first responders and heroic healthcare workers who struggle to address the virus head-on, there are very few of us who aren’t being challenged with balancing the needs of our families, our finances and our futures as the current crisis escalates.

Like most of us, the 375+ individuals who staff Sonoco Reels and Plugs facilities in Hartselle, Alabama are also doing their best to deal with this pandemic. A major producer for two critical sectors of the U.S. economy, Sonoco is obliged to maintain a steady supply of reels to essential manufacturers. The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), a part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, has identified the Communications and Energy Sectors as essential. This puts Sonoco in the challenging position of having to service the needs of its long-term customers as well as the needs of its own employees during this crisis. The firm’s reels carry the wire and cable products that support the important infrastructure behind power and data transmission. At the same time, the needs of Sonoco’s diverse work force may range from tending to homebound school children or vulnerable relatives, to caring for sick or financially strapped family members.

Sonoco’s Vice President and General Manager, Dave Winebarger, is emphatic that the company’s priorities begin with its employees. “The practice we stress at Sonoco is for each person to be responsible for not just his or her own safety, but also that of all co-workers. So we have been making accommodations for those associates who are required to stay at home or need to make adjustments in order to ensure their well being and that of their families.”

At the same time, exceptional precautions and procedures have been implemented within the workplace. “Our janitorial crews have shifted their focus from housekeeping duties to repetitive sanitation of common use and higher traffic areas,” said Matt Williams, Wood Reels Plant Manager. “All machinery operators wipe down equipment touch points at every lunch break and end of shift. We also maintain proper physical ‘social’ distances as recommended throughout the facilities.”

Those who are not essential to basic operations have been asked to work remotely. Production workers are divided across three shifts a day in an effort to fulfill the needs of Sonoco customers while maintaining safety standards. Additional workers are being added to all shifts to support growing demands. Even high school students enrolled in the two-year-old Tiger Launch program remain working despite the recent school shut downs. Jointly developed and supported by Hartselle schools and businesses, Tiger Launch is an apprentice-type program that has become a successful part of Sonoco’s local engagement and a boost to the area’s high school curriculum.

Formed in 1957 the original company, Baker Industries, made wooden munitions boxes for the U.S. military to replenish the inventory depleted by the Korean War. Its founder and Decatur native, Raymon Baker, continuously adapted his companies and their capabilities, endeavoring to meet the needs of their markets and support local communities. Wood and steel reels eventually became their primary offering. Sonoco acquired Baker in 1980.

Employment at Sonoco Reels and Plugs has grown by more than 100 workers in the last four years. Still, the need for added personnel is expected to continue into the foreseeable future.

“The effect this pandemic will have on our culture, our community, our commerce, will surely cause a profound shift in our professional lives going forward,” Winebarger said. He foresees an expansion of the kind of skills and talents the company will be looking for in coming years.

The reels division is just a small part of the broad and diverse range of business Sonoco conducts around the world. “We want to maintain the positive impact on this region that Raymon Baker developed over the company’s first 23 years, and that Sonoco has built upon over the four decades since,” Winebarger noted. “Our key objectives at Sonoco Reels and Plugs are to make high quality products, maintain a strong community presence, and offer unlimited career opportunities for the people of North Alabama.”

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**About Sonoco**
Founded in 1899, Sonoco (NYSE: SON) is a global provider of a variety of consumer packaging, industrial products, protective packaging, and displays and packaging supply chain services. With annualized net sales of approximately $5.4 billion, the Company has 23,000 employees working in approximately 300 operations in 36 countries, serving some of the world’s best known brands in some 85 nations. Sonoco is committed to creating sustainable products, services and programs for our customers, employees and communities that support our corporate purpose of Better Packaging. Better Life. The Company ranked first in the Packaging sector on Fortune’s World’s Most Admired Companies for 2020 as well as Barron’s 100 Most Sustainable Companies. For more information, visit www.sonoco.com.

Company contact:

Sonoco Reels and Plugs

Dave Winebarger — 800/633-3962

dave.winebarger@sonoco.com

Agency Contact:

SELMARQ

Jeff Rothe — 704/957-0585

jrothe@selmarq.com