Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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A few weeks ago, on the busy Colorado river reservation near, Parker, Ariz., Sam Lockshin, President of Prest-Wheel, Inc., turned the keys to his firm's branch plant over to two Colorado River Indians: Vincent Scott, superintendent and Myron Murdock, production planning manager.

It's the first time that non-Indian businessman have transformed total management responsibilities to their Indian employees. People who watch such things believe it may be a trend in the making.

Each year more and more enterprises are finding profitable locations on American Indian reservations. Bureau of Indian Affairs surveys show that 184 plants employing 6,000 Indian people are raising the standards of living of tribes on or near the reservations. Forty-two new plants, or, on the average, about one every nine days, have been located on an Indian site during the past year.

Many Indian employees hold management jobs, such as Scott and Murdock; others are being groomed for top management positions. Five of the 184 plants are completely Indian-owned. These vary from the Crow Tribe's Poplar, Mont., operation that repairs military hardware to one owned by the Cherokee Nation in Stillwell, Okla., which manufactures electronic components.

Navajo Forest Products Industries (NFPI) is fulfilling all of the criteria for a successful industry on the reservation; making money, hiring and training Navajo and preserving the natural resources as trees are harvested on a sustained yield basis.

During the 1969 fiscal year, NFPI showed a net profit of more than $1.5 million.

The Navajo Tribal Utility Authority, bringing lights, gas, water and sewage facilities to areas that never had them before, showed a fiscal net profit of almost 400,000.

Both enterprises operate with their own tribal board of directors.

Last year, the Bureau estimated that about 26 new Indian jobs per week were created for the Indian people through new industries on or near the reservations.

That manufacturers are satisfied with their locations is indicated by the Fairchild semiconductor Division at Shiprock, N.M., which increased its largely Navajo work force from 880 to 1,202 in the first nine months of 1969. At Fairchild, only 25 of the time employees are non-Indian, and 30 of its 33 supervisors are Indian.

In making the managerial announcement at Colorado River, Lockshin, whose Massachusetts-based company makes aluminum outdoor lawn furniture, said he will continue to maintain an Indian managerial staff and plans to visit the reservation only once a month.

He hopes to have 300 employees in Parker by 1971. Present employment is 115, of whom 93 are Indians. The plant was opened a year and a-half ago in a 65,000 square foot building owned by the tribe and leased to the firm.