

# 'You never want to lose a company': Saputo set to close doors next week



Photo: Sean Mott/Telegraph-Journal

Sean Mott | Telegraph-Journal

SAINT JOHN • Saint John's Saputo milk processing plant will close its doors for good at the end of this month, impacting 65 workers.

Last February, Saputo Inc. announced it would be shuttering its Millidge Avenue plant in January 2021, citing efforts to improve its “operational efficiency” and “rightsize” its manufacturing and sales force footprint in Canada.

After a year of unexpected turbulence from the COVID-19

pandemic, Saputo has confirmed the planned closure will go ahead on Jan. 30, closing the book on a facility with a 90-year history.

The operation, originally owned by the Baxter's Dairy company, opened its doors in 1931. Local historian Harold Wright told the Telegraph-Journal in a previous interview that Robert Baxter, who served in the First World War, opened the facility.

Saputo purchased the building in 2001.

"You never want to lose a company with the history of Baxter," said Saint John-Rothesay MP Wayne Long. "It's a date we knew was coming."

David Duplisea, CEO of the Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce, said the "writing was on the wall" regarding the closure of the building, although it doesn't make it easier to accept.

"My heart goes out to the families," he said. "This (closure) just adds to the whole problem (in the city)."

It's more than history that will be impacted by the closure as dozens of workers will have to find new sources of income. In an emailed statement, Saputo confirmed 65 employees will be affected by the closure of the facility.

"Impacted employees have been provided with severance and outplacement support, and some have been offered the possibility of transferring to other Saputo locations," the emailed statement read.

Long said his office made itself available to employees to help them and support and benefit options.

Saputo announced last year it would close both its Saint John operation and another facility in Trenton, Ont.

“Over recent years, Saputo has maintained efforts to pursue additional efficiencies and decrease costs while strengthening its market presence,” the company noted in a press release at the time.

Brian Howell worked at the facility from 1971 to 2005. He told the Telegraph-Journal in a previous interview he was sad to see the facility shut down, but he wasn't surprised by the closure.

“I was surprised it took this long [to close],” he said. “It was a physically older plant. It’s still in a residential area, which hampers [Saputo’s] expansion ability.”

As for the building itself, its future remains undecided.

"Our priority remains our impacted employees and servicing our customers," Saputo said in an email. "We will consider the future of the facility at a later date."