

MIAMI TODAY

WEEK OF THURSDAY, MAY 21, 2015

A Singular Voice in an Evolving City

WWW.MIAMITODAYNEWS.COM \$4.00

MIAMI TODAY

TODAY'S NEWS

WEEK OF THURSDAY, MAY 21

Plans for bus factory move forward in search for location

By JOHN CHARLES ROBBINS

Plans are moving ahead for two Turkish brothers who plan to open a bus manufacturing facility in Miami-Dade County.

In March, Claude and Jan Nahum of Karsan U.S.A. announced their ambition of establishing a plant to build cost-efficient, eco-friendly buses.

Their introduction into the area's industrial scene might come in the form of a contract with Miami-Dade County government for supplying buses powered by natural gas and the fueling stations to keep them humming.

Nopetro, which bills itself as Florida's leading compressed natural gas (CNG) fueling infrastructure provider, has teamed with Karsan U.S.A. in a bid to gain the county contract.

It could mean an initial investment of about \$75 million for construction of the manufacturing facility and the special fueling stations. That figure doesn't include the cost of the new buses.



The company assembles buses at a factory near Istanbul as it looks to begin operations in Miami-Dade.

It's one of a handful of proposals still being considered by county officials.

The decision on that lucrative contract with the county is to be made this summer. In the meantime, the brothers have local assistance in searching for the perfect place to open their plant.

"We continue to work with the commercial division of EWM Realty International on potential sites for a Karsan assemblage

and manufacturing facility in Miami-Dade County," said Claude Nahum.

"We have narrowed the process to a number of sites in varied locations within the county. We look forward to furthering this process, and will be making an announcement as we finalize our vetting, narrowing the list to a short list of sites that best fit our needs," he said.

The Nahums told Miami Today

in March they planned to establish a manufacturing facility in Miami-Dade whether or not they and Nopetro get the county deal.

That's still the plan.

Working hard to secure a variety of suitable properties to choose from is Ron Shuffield, president of EWM Realty International.

"We've been reaching out to various brokers we know who deal in that property type," said Mr. Shuffield. "We're collecting

properties right now for Claude and Jan to see when they come back."

He said he's working on a schedule that will allow the Nahums to view as many properties as they can in one trip.

"We're pretty open to different varieties of properties, from existing buildings retrofitted to their need or to new construction where a developer builds to suit them," Mr. Shuffield said.

The brothers prefer to build new, he said, but recognize that setting up operations in an existing facility could speed the process, especially if they wish to move sooner rather than later.

The bottom line is: They want to open an assembly facility and soon.

"They are looking at other opportunities to build buses and export to other locations across the country," Mr. Shuffield said.

Hopefully they will secure the county contact, he said, "but regardless of that, they're still looking at many other markets embracing the new type of buses."

The Miami-Dade location is attractive to the Nahums and many other industrial interests, due in large part to "our access to so many other global markets — all the potential we have," Mr. Shuffield said.

They are considering sites that closely mirror the operation in Turkey.

They need about 8 acres, with an established building of about 110,000 square feet or room to build that large. The building would take up only a few acres. The remaining property would be needed for storage of materials and the finished buses.

Jan Nahum had estimated costs of \$5 million to \$6 million to build the assembly line.

They envision the plant employing 80 to 90 full-time blue- and white-collar workers.

If the county contract is awarded this summer and they can get a quick start, they could be delivering new natural gas powered buses to the county by mid-2016, according to Claude Nahum.

The company's goal is to transform all government fleets in the Southeast US to natural gas.

Claude Nahum said the overall vision is beyond using a different fuel source and touches on the size of the buses and how they are used, which can be wasteful.

"Changing to CNG is only a starting point," he said, adding that plenty more can be done to make public transit more economical.

He said it might take some time to establish themselves as American manufacturers, but they're optimistic about providing quality products here.

The Nahums' interest in this area is indicative of a healthy industrial sector in South Florida, said Mr. Shuffield.

"As we're talking to fellow brokers there is a lot of enthusiasm, not only for Karsan's project but what we're seeing with other projects... hundreds of thousands of square feet," he said. "There is a lot of good energy in this industrial space right now, and of course that means new jobs and new products introduced to our market."