

Product launch boosts Towns' employment

■ Magnate backs Medway for new venture

by Trevor Sturgess

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RICE is poised to create hundreds of new jobs in Medway.

Award-winning entrepreneur Moni Varma, the founder of Veetee Rice, has launched a range of cooked rice products that can be heated in a microwave.

Mr Varma, who was born in Malawi to Indian parents, employs about 200 people at the firm's base on the Medway City Estate, Strood.

But many more will be needed as sales of the new lines take off.

Mr Varma said: "There will be at least 400 to 500 jobs here. I am absolutely convinced about this product."

Waitrose is already selling the Dine In range of basmati, Thai jasmine and pilau rice developed in the company's kitchens in Medway. Other supermarkets will be stocking them soon.

The new line is aimed at the booming ready-meals market, which is worth billions of pounds.

FACTFILE

Mr Varma was named Asian of the Year 2006, and often features in lists of the UK's richest people. He owns factories in India, Pakistan and Africa.

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The lines have a 12-month shelf life and are ready to eat after two minutes in the oven.

Mr Varma, 58, geared up for the launch by spending £25 million on a huge warehouse and offices on a five-acre site at Neptune Close, close to the firm's existing storage area on the banks of the River Medway.

The warehouse is equipped with the latest machinery that, at full capacity, will be able to turn out 6,000 packs an hour.



■ Moni Varma from Veetee foods, Medway City Estate

Other convenience products are in the pipeline.

Speaking exclusively to the Medway Messenger, the rice magnate revealed he could have produced the new lines overseas.

Support

However, he wanted to support Medway because it has been good to him and his business since he started in 1985.

Today, Veetee Rice is one of the world's biggest suppliers of dried rice. Now it wants to be equally big in rice ready meals.

Mr Varma said there was a gap in the market because he claimed other instant rice products were poor quality.

He said: "If I thought the job was being done very well, I wouldn't have come up with this.

"I don't think consumers are getting what they deserve. If anybody can find a better product, I will give them their money back.

"I'm thrilled to bits with the early response and I think it's going to be a runaway success."

