Media Release

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Inauguration of GF Machining Solutions’ innovative new headquarters in Biel/Bienne, Switzerland

“This is by far the biggest plant for the machine tooling industry in Switzerland,” says Pascal Boillat, President, GF Machining Solutions. “Our ambition is to be the best, and with this new headquarters we have a fantastic tool for the future to realise our ambition on a long-term basis. From this new site we will consolidate our position as a global player and offer the best solutions to our customers worldwide, while underlining our Swiss roots.”

On September 13, 2019, the new headquarters of GF Machining Solutions was inaugurated in Biel/Bienne, Switzerland. The new building, which took 26 months to construct, will house 450 employees from 29 nationalities and comprise under one roof the former nearby facilities of Ipsach (former Center of Competence), Nidau (former Milling production site) and Luterbach (Step-Tec). Hosted by the Swiss sports TV journalist Annette Fetscherin, the inauguration ceremony was attended by over 300 guests and included speeches by the GF management and representatives from politics and business.

Investment in the Swiss Silicon Valley

“When the project of this new building arose in 2015, the Swiss franc was strengthening a lot and everybody was talking about delocalizing production,” Boillat says. “We didn’t. And in the long haul, we can see that the Made in Switzerland brand rewards all those efforts. Here we have an efficient education system, young talents, and renowned universities, so there’s everything we need to make premium machines.”

“GF investing here in Switzerland sends a strong signal, which aims to underline how technological know-how and expertise are closely related to people and the territory,” says Antonio Faccio, Head of Market Region Europe and South America, GF Machining Solutions. “This combination has contributed to the success in recent years of our Milling solutions, with an important double-digit growth.”

The decision to build the new headquarters in Biel/Bienne was easy, as Boillat explains: “In Switzerland, if you make a circle of 50 km around Biel, you will have 90% of the Swiss machine tool
industry and 80% of watchmakers inside that circle. You can say that Biel is the Swiss Silicon Valley of mechanics, the heartland of the Swiss precision industry.”

The location of this site is also strategic because it is easier to find highly-skilled people working in the precision machining industry. Universities like the EPFL in Lausanne or the ETH in Zurich, as well as the Biel/Bienne University of Applied Sciences with its Engineering and Information Technology Department, are close by. Every year, GF Machining Solutions welcomes 12 new apprentices, and currently, 46 apprentices are working at the Biel/Bienne site.

Andreas Müller, CEO of GF, supports the enthusiasm for this achievement. “This is our biggest investment in Switzerland in over 30 years, and our most modern facility for the development and production of Milling machines, Spindles and solutions for Automation.”

“Swiss-made is more than a confirmation of a certain origin: it is a global brand for quality and reliability,” he adds. “GF is present in 40 countries; wherever we deliver solutions, products and services to our customers, they expect and deserve Swiss quality.”

Grand opening
The opening ceremony included speeches from local political representatives that stressed the importance of the investment made by GF and foresaw a win-win situation both for GF and for the city of Biel/Bienne.

Christoph Ammann, President of the Cantonal Government and Head of the Cantonal Department of Economic Affairs, said: “The entire population of Biel will benefit from this new site. The presence of GF in our municipality represents a strong and extremely positive signal for the local economy and for the nearby mechanics and precision industry, and is an important addition to the Switzerland Innovation Park of Biel.”

Erich Fehr, Mayor of the City of Biel/Bienne, agreed with him: “Switzerland Innovation Park is a cluster of precision engineering firms and watchmakers in Biel. Here, local companies intermingle, and all have the space and the resources they need to develop their projects. They also have the opportunities to be in constant contact with universities and tech schools, thus enjoying a preferred channel to hire the specialists and highly skilled young professionals—the people behind tomorrow’s success of companies like GF Machining Solutions.”

A new state-of-the-art site
The two-story Biel/Bienne site includes, in addition to offices, a production and assembly plant for both Milling and Laser, as well as a Competence and Application Centre to support customers in implementing Automation solutions according to Industry 4.0 requirements.

GF invested over 100 million Swiss francs – that is around 91 million EUR – to build a modern, state-of-the-art facility. The functionality of project rooms, design thinking rooms, open space offices, and relaxation areas with sofas is enhanced by a generous use of natural light in order to boost the comfort of employees. The building is energy efficient and promotes sustainability. The insulation is made with mineral wool, the pre-cooling system allows an efficient use and dispersion of energy, and the building is designed to be sustainable over its entire lifecycle.”
of heat in the production zones, and the centralized cooling water system ensures an optimal usage of resources. Additionally, employees are motivated to use public transport or bicycles to commute to work.

**Production capabilities**

The production plant is intended to support a capacity of 65 machines per month, and is equipped to comply with all major traceability and certifications requirements. The construction and assembly of the Milling machines follows an agile but strict step-by-step protocol, from the temperature of the machine bed to the customization of the electrical cabinet and the integration of Automation. Up to 2,300 Spindles are tested annually, with a test duration of four to eight hours, and six employees are dedicated entirely to Spindle analysis and diagnosis.

The large Application Center shows the company’s skills in Milling and Automation, with a production line including a robot that serves for the development of automated solutions for customers during the day, while producing parts for the machines at night. The automated warehouse can manage up to 8,000 pallets.

Bringing the team together in one place, GF Machining Solutions will experience faster innovation and will be able to deliver solutions to the market more quickly, remaining competitive while based in a high-cost country. Boillat says, “We need to continue focusing on innovation in order to keep being competitive on a global scale and differentiate ourselves from our competitors.”

Vincent Mohni, Head of Technical Unit Milling at GF Machining Solutions, adds, “While many people see this new HQ as an achievement, I personally see it as the beginning of our journey. This site is like a masterpiece for production of high tech and high-quality Swiss five-axis Milling centers, Spindles, and Laser machines—all driven by digital intelligence.”

“In ICT, for example, we need to produce components with tolerances 25 to 50 times smaller than a hair, with extreme reliability and repeatability,” says Mohni. “On the other hand, in aerospace and automotive, we need to achieve high accuracy and surface quality on parts that weigh two to four tons. Furthermore, to increase our customers’ competitiveness and improve their flexibility, automated processes are a must.”

**New machines in new design**

The tour of the production site offered the guests a preview of the new machines that are going to be available on the market in the next few months. The new Mikron MILL P 500 is a three-axis high precision vertical machining center with a high removal capacity for the molding sector. It is designed for a very high performance and aims to meet the requirements in terms of precision and competitiveness required by the ICT and electronics market.

The new five-axis MILL P 1400 U, to be launched in 2020, displays an axis stroke of 1400 x 1300 x 750 mm and allows the machining of workpieces up to three tons, which are useful characteristics when it comes to ensuring the maximum precision and productivity even for the biggest components in sectors as automotive and aerospace.
Both machines will present a brand-new design, and Faccio explains the reason behind this facelift: "As GF Machining Solutions showcases different technologies, we wanted our customers to be able to rely on a clear and unique brand. Over the years, the process has been to create, under the ‘GF Machining Solutions’ label, different solutions that integrate machining, Automation and software for production efficiency optimization.” The design of the new machines pays a lot of attention to ergonomics, easy access to the machines, and simple integration of automation solutions. It also allows the intuitive recognition of the technology through a unique identifier, for example Milling, EDM, or Laser. The new design is already a standard on the new machines and will gradually also be made available for previous models.

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Profile of GF Machining Solutions
GF Machining Solutions is the world’s leading provider of machine tools, diverse technical solutions and services to manufacturers of precision molds and tooling and of tight-tolerance, precision-machined components. The key segments we serve include the aerospace, automotive, medical, energy, information and communications technology (ICT) and electronics industries. Our extensive portfolio ranges from Electrical Discharge Machining (EDM) solutions, three- and five-axis Milling machines and Spindles, 3D Laser texturing machines, Additive Manufacturing and machines for Laser micromachining to solutions for Tooling, Automation, Software and Digitalization—all backed by unrivaled Customer Services and support. GF Machining Solutions is a globally acting Division of the Georg Fischer Group (Switzerland) and maintains a presence at 50 locations worldwide. Its 3,394 employees generated sales of CHF 1,066 million in 2018. More information can be found at www.gfms.com.