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Start-Up NY: PC tablet manufacturer set to roll in Buffalo

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Start-up technology company BAK USA LLC is almost ready to begin manufacturing PC tablets and cellphones from its new global headquarters in Buffalo.

By early December, a small team of operators will start churning out low-cost products that will be largely marketed to African countries, company president Ulla Bak said. Assembly will take place on the top floor of the Compass East Center at 425 Michigan Ave.

So far, 20 workers — including 14 who are foreign-born — have been hired to assemble tablets, Bak said. In total, the company plans to employ approximately 100 people by next fall, recruiting primarily from the city's under-employed minority and foreign-born population, Bak said.

"Diversity is a big issue for us," she said. "Because we're looking for diversity of ethnicities, our workforce will end up reflecting the people to whom we'll export the products. We really hope that we can get a good mix of people into our business."

BAK is poised to become one of the first companies in the world to assemble electronic tablets outside of Asia. It is one of 21 local companies accepted into Start-Up NY, New York's tax incentive program that offers a decade's worth of tax breaks to companies that want to open or expand in certain areas of the state.

Bak and her husband, J.P. Bak, are retired attorneys from Denmark who came to the United States in 1998. They lived in California for several years before moving to Pittsburgh, and they are now living in Buffalo.

Spurred by a mindset of social justice for all, they went to Haiti and established a foundation to build houses in the aftermath of that country's 2010 earthquake. Three years later, they opened a PC tablet manufacturing company in Port-au-Prince and hope to replicate that model.
Ulla Bak said employees will assemble tablets "from A to Z" rather than working on an assembly line. She said the set-up will set the company apart from Chinese manufacturers. "We want our operators to be accountable for the products they make," she said.

Allissa Kline covers financial services, accounting and trade