



CBC Group Company Acquires Will & Baumer Candle Company

PHOENIX (January 31, 2008) -- Jeff Fields, president of the Will & Bauer candle company points to where candle sticks are produced by an extrusion machine.

Resumption of candle-making by Will & Baumer, the historic business that's moved to Lewisburg from Syracuse, N.Y., is a bittersweet transition for a close-knit production team with some working here now and others who couldn't move.

Will & Baumer "is the oldest candle company in America," said Paul DiGiovanni, one of two sons running CBC Group in Phoenix, Ariz., the business built by their father and the company that bought Will & Baumer in January 2008.

"Those of us who came here from a location other than Syracuse can't understand how emotional an experience that is," DiGiovanni said of the end of production in New York State where more than two dozen former employees stayed. Half a dozen moved to work here.

"There's 155 years of history there," DiGiovanni said. "When looking at it financially and historically, the move is great for the brand, but we left some good, hard-working people behind who could not come... people with 20, 30 and 50 years..."

"It's a plus for the people of Marshall County," he said. "It wouldn't have been possible except for the people in Syracuse."

Nor would it have been possible without Marshall Ciccone, whose three decades with the company include five years as president when he helped negotiate survival of the company that he now serves as regional sales manager and co-owner.

Will & Baumer candles are made especially for Catholic Church services and Ciccone noted that he was explaining these emotion-filled transitions on Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent and 46 days before Easter, a Christian holy day that's important for the ebb and flow of Will & Baumer's schedule.

Acknowledging the state of America's economy and that Marshall County's unemployment rates have been approaching those of the Great Depression; Ciccone said, "I came to Will & Baumer much because of conditions like that in 1981."

Interest rates were at 20 percent. America was in the grip of an oil crisis. He'd been in the manufactured building business, but there was no construction.

"I was basically destitute," said Ciccone who responded to a blind help-wanted ad. "Will & Baumer was the job I got... I feel for the people here."

Serving his part in the transition has been "very rewarding," he said, turning to Paul DiGiovanni and his older brother, Tom DiGiovanni, who quietly participated in a conference-room interview a day before the ribbon cutting for Will & Baumer was coordinated by the Marshall County Chamber of Commerce.

"These two gentlemen saw the brand and had the guts to take on a 155-year-old company and move it to Tennessee," Ciccone said. "Buying was one thing, but moving is another."



Paul and Tom DiGiovanni declined to be photographed in the candle factory Wednesday, saying the ceremonial opening and explanation of the plant's operation was a time for Ciccone and his successor, Jeff Fields, the president who described candle making by Will & Baumer.

"The down-side (of the business' situation) would be an empty building in Syracuse," Ciccone said of a series of structures built over 15 decades that could not serve candle production as well as the new facility in Lewisburg.

"I had no doubts when I got here that I did the right thing" by shepherding the sale of Will & Baumer to the DiGiovanni brothers' business, he said.

Ciccone's successor is Jeff Fields who sees the transition of candle production from New York to Tennessee as a seminal development for the company similar to a move by its founder, a carpenter who came to America from Germany.

Anton Will made candles for his own use, but friends asked for candles and he soon realized candles were more profitable for him than carpentry. After his death, his widow merged his business with Frances Baumer's candle company and the private company prospered for more than a century.

Now in Lewisburg, there's an opportunity for growth of the candle company. There's room for an addition to the west, according to the brothers and their company leaders, including Monte Mertens, operations manager for the businesses.

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MEDIA CONTACTS:

Brian Schroeder
Vice President, Sales & Marketing
(513) 608-3080
bschroeder@cg-gift.com