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Craftmaster expanding to Wilkes

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Taylorsville-based Craftmaster Furniture is expanding its manufacturing operation into Wilkes County by opening a new sewing plant in a facility in Wilkesboro.

The company announced today that the operation in Wilkesboro, an expansion of Craftmaster Furniture's sewing department at its main plant in Hiddenite, will employ 25-30 sewers within the next few months.

The new operation is expected to be operating by the end of March, said Roy Calcagne, president/CEO of Craftmaster Furniture. It will expand Craftmaster's sewing capacity by 25 percent when fully operational, said Calcagne.

It's occupying about two-thirds (27,000 square feet) of a manufacturing facility at the intersection of Industrial Drive and the old county airport runway near the Lowe's Park at River's Edge. Webco Printing originally constructed the building. Craftmaster is leasing the space from the building's owner, Tommy Sofield, president of U.S. Buildings.

"I am very excited to announce the expansion of our manufacturing operation to Wilkes County, which has a long and storied history of fine furniture manufacturing dating back to the late 1800s," he said.

"We have been very fortunate to have experienced unprecedented growth over the past several years in our three facilities based here in Taylorsville. This growth is a testament to the strength of the upholstery segment within the furniture industry and the need for high quality U.S. manufacturing," added Calcagne.

He said domestic demand for Craftmaster's upholstered furniture, sold in the middle to upper-middle price ranges, has increased significantly in recent years. The company now employs about 600 people, up from about 400 four or five years ago.

As a result of upholstered furniture manufacturing operations closing in Wilkes in recent years, said Calcagne, the county has a pool of skilled labor that Craftmaster needs as it continues to grow. He said this influenced the company's decision to open a plant in Wilkes and that he's optimistic about the potential for the company's growth in Wilkes.

"We are working closely with Ricky Roten and Kim Bell with the NC Works Career Center (in Wilkesboro) taking applications for experienced upholstery sewers for this new facility.

"Wilkes County is known for making high quality upholstered products and we believe there are many skilled sewers that would like to come join the Craftmaster organization," said Calcagne.

He said experienced sewers can apply by contacting the human resources department at Craftmaster Furniture in Hiddenite at 828-485-2601 or Kim Bell at the NC Works Career Center at 838 5164.

Craftmaster is also seeking furniture upholsterers for its plants in Alexander County, he said.

The company purchased 25 sewing machines for the new operation in Wilkes and is investing in upfitting the building over the next several weeks. Pieces of upholstered furniture covers will be sewn together at the plant and then taken back to plants in Alexander County.

Dan Little, director of the Wilkes Economic Development Corp., said the EDC board agreed to allocate up to \$10,000 to Craftmaster at the end of 2015 to help cover costs of upfitting the building and other expenses of opening the new operation if the company maintains at least 20 new jobs here until then. Little said the money is from the EDC's LEEP fund, which is entirely from private sources.

"I would like to thank Dan Little and Robin Hamby from the Wilkes County EDC for their hard work and effort in making this happen so quickly. We approached the EDC about four weeks ago with our desire to expand into Wilkes County and they set up tours of several possible sites. Dan and Robin worked closely with our team in finalizing a location and offered the full support of the EDC.

Craftmaster Furniture was founded in 1972 in Taylorsville and specializes in moderately priced upholstery produced in the U.S. It offers a broad selection of upholstered products and provides custom order, with over 150 living room styles, 100 accent chairs and over 800 fabrics.

Craftmaster also produces the Paula Deen Home Collection under a licensed agreement with the celebrity Chef. Craftmaster is a subsidiary of Samson Holdings, along with Universal Furniture and Legacy Classic Furniture. Craftmaster's website is www.cmfurniture.com.