

Manufacturer Survives and Thrives By Making Bold Changes

By Charlene H. Nelson

Several months ago David and Wanda York of 3-T Hosiery found themselves in a situation that many hosiery manufacturers are facing: With foreign competition eroding their profits, they were going to either have to rethink their ways of doing business or close the doors to the family-owned company.

"White goods were going offshore and they had been the bread and butter of our business for the past six years," explains Wanda. "We needed to change because if we stayed like we were, we knew we would

not make it."

It was either sink or swim and the business owners decided to swim. They took some bold steps toward upgrading their business and finding new markets. The first step was to purchase 15 5-inch 84 needle computerized knitting machines that would allow them to begin making heavier boot socks and give them welt-top capability.

"This allowed us to get our feet wet with computerized machines, and it was a relatively inexpensive way to upgrade because we could buy the machines used," says David.

"Prior to those purchases, we had machines that had the date of 1898 stamped on them."

But the couple didn't stop there. To stay alive, they knew they had to open more markets. So, they purchased five new Angie 12.3 132 needle machines which allows them to do pattern and logo work and knit casual socks.

"We knew we had to become versatile," says David. "We needed the machines so that when people called, we could offer more. We wanted to get to where we could do more small quantity and specialty items."

It also allowed the company to begin the transformation from strictly a greige goods knitter to a vertical mill. The couple decided to begin selling direct which they are now doing through a wholesaler. They are outsourcing the finishing, but plan to eventually have the capability to do their own finishing.

"What we want to do is maintain our greige goods business and add the vertical business," says Wanda.

With all the improvements that were necessary to install the machines, the company has probably invested about \$150,000, an investment which the couple says is paying off.

"Business has improved dramatically," says David.



David and Wanda York Upgraded Their Manufacturing Processes With Computerized Knitting Machines

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“Normally, this time of year, we are considerably slower, but the addition of new machinery has increased our production,” adds Wanda.

Purchasing the new machinery is not all the couple is doing to stay ahead of the game. They are working on several new products and looking at new and different markets. They have worked with the Hosiery Technology Center to streamline the plant and implement lean manufacturing concepts. The center is

also helping them with product development.

“It is one thing to have an idea for a new product, but you need someone to tell you how to do it, and The Hosiery Technology Center is helping with that.” says David. “We have ideas for products that are currently not available but which there is a need for in the market.”

The Yorks, who began 3-T Hosiery in a rented building seven years ago, recently purchased the building and the house next door. Wanda and David and their three children live in the house. The 3-T name is after the children, Tyler, 17, and Tiffany 16, who both work part-time for the company, and eight-year-old Trevor.

“We have seen more change in the past six months than in the past six years,” says David.

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