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## Furniture company will add 302 jobs

**Ethan Allen, bucking the downward trend in state's industry, will expand its upholstery plant in Maiden.**

By Alan M. Wolf  
Posted: Friday, Jun. 05, 2009

In a rare bit of bright news for North Carolina's beleaguered furniture industry, Ethan Allen Interiors Inc. said Wednesday it plans to expand its upholstery operations in Maiden and add 302 jobs over the next three years.

The Maiden factory, which opened in 1949, already employs 540. The company is shifting some upholstery manufacturing from a leased plant it will close in Chino, Calif., in a move that will cost 65 workers, plus 137 contract employees, their jobs.

Ethan Allen, which manufactures high-quality upholstered furniture for residential and commercial customers, will invest \$2.79 million in its Maiden facility over the next three years, state officials announced.

That's good news for Maiden, a town of 3,000 about 40 miles northwest of Charlotte, where unemployment hovered around 15 percent last month and the manufacturing industry's decline has pummeled workers in years past, town officials said.

"Furniture is tied to the housing industry, and you wouldn't expect good news to come out of that end, but it's great news," said Nathan Huret, existing industry coordinator for the Catawba County Economic Development Corp. "That's one of the largest employers in Maiden, and it's tremendously important to the lifeblood of the town. ... That's a huge impact, mentally."

Furniture and textile plants have longed formed the economic backbone of Catawba and surrounding counties, but the area has lost thousands of jobs in the industries in the past decade.

In 1990, half of local jobs were in manufacturing, but that figure dropped to one-third in recent years and will likely fall further, local officials have said.

The Ethan Allen expansion will replace 143 jobs lost in earlier layoffs and add 159 new jobs paying an annual wage of almost \$40,000. The move was helped in part by a \$109,000 grant from the One North Carolina Fund, which provides incentives through local governments to attract business projects that will create new jobs, state officials said.

Companies receive money up front and must meet job creation and investment standards to qualify for the money.

Maiden Mayor Bob Smyre said he's "extremely proud" about the expansion.

"We're in a time when jobs are crucial," he said. "It's really going to boost our economy."

As with other furniture makers, the Danbury, Conn.-based Ethan Allen is struggling with slowing sales, as the downturn has curbed consumers' appetite for the furniture and home furnishings it sells at 290 design centers and online.

Ethan Allen operates eight manufacturing facilities in the U.S., including two sawmills, and one manufacturing facility in Mexico. The company's two Maiden plants make custom handcrafted upholstered furniture.

Local officials said hiring will begin immediately. For more information on Ethan Allen and job opportunities there, visit [www.ethanallen.com](http://www.ethanallen.com).