

Bassett goes green



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A Newton manufacturer paved the road green for other companies to follow.

Bassett Upholstery Division recently received the Enhancing Furniture's Environmental Culture certification from American Home Furnishing Alliance.

Manager Mark Jordan said the program is meant to take one year to complete, but Bassett Industries' Newton manufacturer completed certification in six months.

"It started with the Furniture Manufacturers Association," Jordan said "(The program) focused on recycling material you put into furniture. Once you get recycling program in place, you can use other materials such as recycled steel."

Scott Brittain, quality assurance facilitator, and Product Manager Mark Albright led a 12 person committee consisting of division leaders, sales reps and others in the company to lead training session with employees so they understood the environment-friendly changes that were about to take place.

"We went through a culture change," Albright said. "Employees are taking an active part here and at home in recycling and turning off lights."

The manufacturing plant has 435 employees, and each of them learned about the recycling center and about reducing energy.

For Bassett, the first step was to reduce waste it sent to the landfill, which it did by 50 percent.

"We decided as a company to start being more friendly with the environment," Jordan said. "We wanted to be better citizens and stewards of the environment."

Instead of throwing away scrap materials, Jordan and Albright used the excess material for bags. They gave away the bags to employees in training sessions.

However, the company also wanted to cut down its energy costs 4 percent by June 2010. Jordan said Bassett decided to consolidate two shrink tunnel cells into one because of the energy used.

Bassett cut the cost it took to run machinery, lights, gas for trucks to haul materials from both cells and the gas tunnel in two rooms down to one. It still has all of the same employees it took to run both rooms.

"There are two plants at this site," Albright said. "We had two manufacturing cells and they had a shrink tunnel (in one building) and across the street. We moved staff across the street, and we use one shrink tunnel."

There were 12 requirements from the certification, including educating the community. Albright said the next step in raising awareness is going out to middle and elementary schools in Catawba County. Just like Albright and Brittain gave away bags made of recycled material, they will give students something. Albright said a recycled coloring book might be one thing to give children.

In the next year, Albright and Brittain also plan to continue educating employees. Staff members are now assigned specific jobs, such as making sure lights and machinery is turned off.

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