

Van Stee Corp. Is A Furniture Industry Survivor, Celebrates 50 Years

By MANLEY J. ANDERSON

A fourth generation Jamestown furniture company is one of the few survivors from the halcyon era when the city ranked as national leader in the wood segment of the industry.

The Van Stee Corp., at 200 Crescent St., traces its origins to Jacob Van Stee who immigrated from his native Holland at the age of 2, settling with his family in Grand Rapids, Mich., and coming to Jamestown when he was about 19 years old.

"I'm the fourth generation of the company," Scott A. Van Stee, company president said. "My dad is semi-active in the business. He started on Sept. 9, 1946, and we recently celebrated his 50th year with the company."

Donn Van Stee, Scott's father, was the company's president until recently when the position passed on to his son. The younger Van Stee said his parents live in Florida from Labor Day to Memorial Day, while during the summers his father comes into the plant five or six hours a day.

As president, Van Stee is planning a two-phase improvement program once the vacant adjacent Union-National Inc. building is demolished.

Part of the land to be acquired from Jamestown Urban Renewal Agency is to be used to provide an improved location for unloading lumber which now is unloaded in the street.

The first priority is an access road for use by the lumber trucks in loading and unloading and the second phase involves a planned 7,500-square-foot addition as a manufacturing area primarily and warehouse secondarily.

Completion is seen as resulting in hiring of five or six more employees, depending on business levels.

Van Stee said Grand Rapids once reigned as the U.S. capital of wooden furniture but this distinction passed on to Jamestown, noting he has been told that at one time there were more than 45 furniture factories locally. Very few remain.

"We've been strictly bedroom," the furniture man said of Van Stee's place in the industry. He said that in the 1950s the company was the country's largest manufacturer of beds and headboards only, selling 40,000 bed ends a year.