

## Van Stee: Firm Celebrates 50 Years

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"We're on the high medium to low high end," Van Stee said of the company's pricing structure within the furniture hierarchy. "Our quality and price range is around that area."

The building housing the factory began as a three-story wooden structure with a basement and was expanded by a brick addition of the same configuration, later added to by an office and basement. Two more stories were added on top of the office in 1964, with dry kiln and storage areas provided two years ago.

Recent investments in machinery include acquisition of a new dovetail device in February and a wide-belt sander about a year ago at a cost of about \$35,000 each.

Van Stee is looking forward to acquiring a computer navigated control router within the next year or so. The machine can be programmed to accommodate eight different tools and perform a number of functions simultaneously.

"The wood furniture industry has lagged behind in computer technology," the company official said, "and they still have a ways to go."

As for the firm's position within the industry, "We're the quiet company," Van Stee said. "It's a small concern."

Employment is at 27 people and varies up to 35, depending on business volume, with Van Stee noting that acceptance of the company's new bedroom group is expected to result in increased production.

Regarding the work force, he said, "We've got a good group of guys out here. We've got a good nucleus of people in the plant and office."

Van Stee paid his dues en route to becoming the head of the company. The 1981 State College at Fredonia business graduate said, "All of my experience comes from here."

He worked at the factory summers as a collegian and began there full time on May 26, 1981.

"My first job was to clean all the spindles of rubbing compound. It's oil and pumice," he recalled. "I can set up and operate every machine out there."

After several years as a laborer in the plant, Van Stee advanced to machine room foreman and then to be in charge of most of the plant before entering the upper management echelons as vice president and recently president.

Van Stee Corp. was founded in 1904. The name, said Van Stee, "means from the farm. It's a Dutch word."

Van Stee said his great-grandfather founded the company in 1904 as a carving works factory in the building now housing the Ironstone Restaurant at 516 W. Fourth St. and served at the time as a small business incubator.

He said Jacob Van Stee relocated to the present site by 1910 and brought two sons, Ernest and Edwin, into the factory about 1932.

Continuing the family's genealogy, Van Stee said Ernest Van Stee had two sons, Donn C. Van Stee and Gary Van Stee, both of whom came into the business, with Gary leaving it in 1984.