

Armstrong completes \$11Min investments in its Beverly facility

May 29, 2015

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BEVERLY - A leader in hardwood flooring manufacturing and one of Randolph County's biggest employers has made investments totaling about \$11 million during the past 18 months at its Beverly facility, Armstrong officials report.

Steve Bullock, the new plant manager, said the upgrades modernize the 75-acre facility and strengthen the plant's infrastructure

"We've made an \$11 million investment in the last 18 months. One advancement came in this area: Modernization to improve lumber yield, we installed drying technology . We are the only facility in the country that has this drying technology," said Bullock, who has been in his position since March.

Article Photos



Armstrong World Industries Plant Manager Steve Bullock talks about the completion of a series of investments amounting to about \$11 million to modernize the Beverly facility. (The Inter-Mountain photo by Tim MacVean)

"The purpose of the drying technology is to speed our higher species, like maple, into production. So maple, the truck pulls on the yard, to the time it's put into a box to go to the customer is about 40 days. The biggest part of that is drying on the yard and also the drying technology," he said. "With this particular product, with the drying technology, a truck pulls

on the yard, from the time it is ready to process is four days. Forty days through the process to four is a huge difference."

Additional upgrades include re-wiring the machinery throughout the facility as well as increasing the viability of the plant.

"We also are strengthening the infrastructure, which is one of the things we are doing this week. We are actually doing some modernization and strengthening the infrastructure, along with re-wiring a lot of our equipment in the back," Bullock explained. "Once again, since I've been here, since March, there is a lot of people (who) come through time to time and we hear things like 'How viable is the company?' Well, we just put \$11 million in this facility over 18 months. We are here to stay and we're here to make sure that we are keeping up with what we need to."

Bullock said the facility is taking measures to keep up with the ever-changing trends in hardwood flooring design.

"People's taste in flooring continues to evolve and change. People are looking more to a textured floor or more to a featured floor. People want to see knots or feature on the wood so we have several products where we put feature on the wood," Bullock said. "We actually break some of the grain out, we have a product that is going to launch next year that is called 'sawn face,' where we've been putting cross-cut saw looks to the face of the wood and then finishing it. As people's tastes in flooring change we are adding new products here to accommodate that."

In addition to the current upgrades, Armstrong is looking into the future for ways to continue to grow and modernize.

"Another thing that we have coming, probably in the next 18 months to two years, another process that we are looking at and the company is already started down the road with an outside vendor, is that when we cut our lumber, we eventually get pieces too small to make into our flooring," Bullock said. "We have started down the path of actually taking our shorter wood and gluing it together, and then milling it and making a wider plank. This will be a big improvement to increase our yield so we have less lumber that we are grinding up, sending off, selling or burning, so this is part of our future, being able to continue to optimize the lumber that we cut."

Bullock said the final phase of upgrades will be completed the week of July 4.

"As many of you may have seen we are down, the plant is not actually producing product this week," Bullock said. "That is due to a (refurbish) and modernization project that we have going on in our rough end."

Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va., who was present at Thursday's announcement and received an award for her work with the manufacturing industry, said she believes Armstrong World Industries is vital to the region.

"As many of you know there is a legacy issue here with the Armstrong plant. My father was governor when the first dirt was, I think, tossed out to build this plant and it was a great day for Randolph County and for West Virginia to have a major corporation set its footprint here in Beverly, and it's wonderful for me to come and see that legacy grown and see so many families able to stay and grow in the communities they love," Capito said.

"I am very excited to be here. I am very proud of all the manufacturing in West Virginia and I love to see the modernization, what you're doing and how you are moving to the next generation," she added.

Capito also said the upgrades could potentially create more jobs for residents of Randolph County and the surrounding areas.

"The upgrades mean the footprint is much more solid here," Capito said. "If you are upgrading, putting \$11 million in here, you have made a dedication to the plant but what I think they are also hoping is that will bring in some new products which will be really good because that could mean expansion of the workforce."

Jerry Hodge, the National Association of Manufacturers senior director and a member of board relations, was on hand as NAM presented the award to Capito. He said he is happy to see Armstrong World Industries thriving.

"I think Armstrong World Industries is in a very strong position. They are a fantastic company, they make good products," Hodge said. "It's really good to see that they are making these types of investments because it means economic development for the area, it means increased money for suppliers in the area, it means more workers, it means more growth, it means more exports, it means more everything. Armstrong just has such great products that it's great to see."

John Bassett, the vice resident of human resources for Armstrong World Industries, echoed the sentiments of Bullock and said he looks forward to watching Armstrong continue to grow.

"I will say that Armstrong, as a company, we are very happy to have this plant here. As Steve indicated, we have invested a lot of money into this facility," Bassett said. "We have great employees here, a great management team and this plant is very important to our manufacturing footprint."

Bullock concluded the morning's event by expressing that he felt the facility had some issues when he took over, which he plans to work to turn around.

"When I got here it seemed like the facility and Armstrong as an entity in this community was not very strong and I found that to be very troubling, so we are very much committed to reengaging," Bullock said. "One of the things that my staff is committed to, as well as some other employees, is (to) reach out to the community."

Armstrong World Industries consists of 35 plants within six countries and employs 7,500 people worldwide. Six of the plants, including the Beverly location, are hardwood facilities.

The Beverly plant opened its doors in 1989 and was purchased by Armstrong World Industries in 1996. The local facility employs more than 650 people.

"Actually, we will be celebrating the 25th year this summer at this facility so we have been in the valley for 25 years," Bullock said.

Armstrong World Industries is the largest pre-finished hardwood producer in the country and the only facility to offer four different species of wood flooring.

"We are the largest producer of pre-finished hardwood in North America, about 47.5 million square feet a year. Our capacity is about 63 million square feet. We are the only facility in

Armstrong that produces four species," Bullock said. "We are the only facility in Armstrong that produces the number or widths that we produce here. Here we deal with red oak, white oak, hickory, ash and maple."

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