

Mansfield Plumbing Products mentioned in Wall Street Journal story

By JIM BREWER T-G Staff Writer Published: September 26, 2013 4:00AM

PERRYSVILLE -- Mansfield Plumbing Products was mentioned prominently [in a story Tuesday](#) on the resurgence of the American toilet industry in the Wall Street Journal.

The story referred to how MPP President Jim Morando "in previous management jobs watched Chinese imports engulf the U.S. market for vinyl tile, wood flooring and window blinds. Now, as president of Mansfield Plumbing Products, Morando has decided to 'stand and fight.' "

The story repeated earlier reports published in the Times-Gazette that MPP is in the midst of a \$9 million expansion to achieve a 50 percent increase in capacity, and has increased employment from 370 workers four years ago to about 480 today with projections to 550 within six months.

The expansion, the story said, reflects an industry trend "after decades of losing out to foreign rivals, U.S. manufacturing of toilets is making a surprising, if modest, comeback, mostly under foreign ownership." The acquisition of MPP in 2004 by Organizacion Corona, has been paralleled by the purchase of American Standard Brands by Lixil Corp. of Japan.

Those two firms, plus Japanese-owned Toto Ltd. which has a plant in Morrow, Ga., are the second through fourth largest toilet manufacturers in the U.S., according to GMC Research Inc. of Mount Pleasant, S.C. Largest is U.S.-owned Kohler Co., which has a 24 percent share of the U.S. market. MPP's share, GMC reports, is 8 percent.

Morando's quote made last summer that, when making toilets, "you need the strength of a football player and the hands of a sculptor," was repeated by the Journal.

He also repeated the story of his arrival at Mansfield in early 2006 with "the company on the ropes, with production costs about 20 percent above Chinese imports."

"Morando," the story continued, "wanted to keep production in the U.S. That would allow the company to differentiate itself by stressing its ability to get products to customers faster, respond quickly to changes in consumer preferences and offer a 'Made in USA' label, which he believes is increasingly appealing.

"To cut costs, Mansfield automated administrative processes such as order taking and reduced inventories, among other things. Workers, represented by the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, accepted a wage freeze that lasted until 2012 and shouldered a larger share of health care costs."

The story quoted MPP's union secretary-treasurer, Mike Markham, as saying "we've worked together to get them through a rough time."

The Journal called the "toilet turnaround a microcosm of U.S. manufacturing trends."

"The days of chasing cheap labor around the world are coming to an end," William Strang, head of Toto's Americas operations division, said in the story.

Automation impacts this trend, but trans-Pacific shipping costs, and rising Chinese labor costs also are factors, the Journal concluded.