

In the Press

MARCH 2011

NEWS FROM ABSECON MILLS INC.

The Press of Atlantic City has been honored by journalism trade magazine Editor and Publisher as one of the five papers in the country that "shine individually" and was recognized for "digging deep into local content."

MANUFACTURING IN SOUTHERN NEW JERSEY

Fewer jobs on the line



Staff photos by Michael Ein

Angel Sequinot, of Egg Harbor City, guides yarn into a warp March 2 at Absecon Mills in Galloway Township. The firm designs and manufactures fabrics for seating at churches, theaters, stadiums and other venues.

Textile Plant Survives Shrinking Manufacturing Base

By **BRIAN IANIERI**
Staff Writer

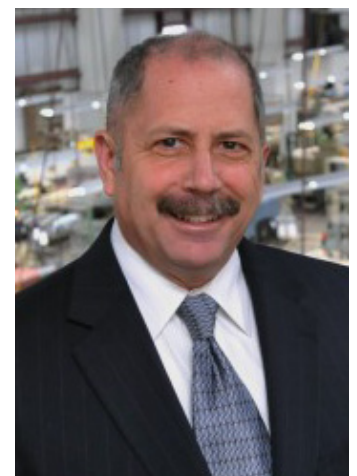
Absecon Mills, a Galloway Township textile plant, has survived by adopting Lean manufacturing.

Employing about 100 people, the plant ships textiles around the world and is one of the area's largest manufacturers. Here, employees run the giant mechanical looms that thump

throughout the day, weaving yarn from oversized spools into fabric for thousands of seats at churches, theaters, stadiums, auditoriums, performing arts centers, hotels, colleges and universities and health care facilities.

The plant in Galloway's Cologne section represents a vast-reaching but altogether shrinking manufacturing base

in southern New Jersey. Many of the region's manufacturers have not survived economic trends as well as Absecon Mills has. Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland and Ocean counties lost a combined 6,821 manufacturing jobs from 2001 to 2009, a 30 percent drop, according to data from the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics. Overall, the number of manu-



CEO Randolph Taylor

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facturers dropped 4 percent.

Plant owner Randolph Taylor insists he can recognize Absecon Mills' fabric anywhere. Sitting on fabric made by Absecon Mills are moviegoers at Regal Cinemas, hockey fans at the New Jersey Devils arena and students at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. Absecon Mills produces 5 million yards of fabric per year, said Taylor, a third-generation textile manufacturer who started the company off Aloe Avenue in 1978.

"Our market is fabric you sit on outside your house," he said.

Many other firms unable to adapt have disappeared or cut staff drastically. To survive, manufacturers in some cases shifted their business models, changed their markets or found new niches, economists said. But Taylor wants to thrive, not just survive. In addition to the core business, the plant is now making ballistic textiles for U.S. military-issue body armor. Winning an upcoming bid could double his number of employees and save the lives of men and women who serve our country, a goal that Taylor keeps close to his heart. With a family history of military service, America's Armed

Forces, he feels, are to be both respected and protected.

Atlantic County had 138 manufacturers in 2009, a 10 percent decrease from 2001, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. While tourism is the region's major economic engine, manufacturing businesses from soy milk producers to metal fabricators and textile plants add their share to the local economy and employment. Taylor's success and the longevity of Absecon Mills can be credited to a concentration on Lean manufacturing, loyal employees, faithful customers, high quality product and a broad view of new markets and challenges. With a genuinely entrepreneurial outlook, Mr. Taylor sees opportunities and transforms them into successes.

There are signs the manufacturing industry is on an uptick as the economy pulls out of the recession. Nationally, manufacturers have begun growing again in the past 19 months, increasing activity steadily since bottoming out in 2008, according to a February report by the Institute for Supply Management. In manufacturing, much is at stake. Large companies that fail or move can cost dozens or hundreds



Linda Taylor, of Galloway Township, Vice President of Design and Marketing for Absecon Mills, looks over samples.

of jobs.

Back at Absecon Mills, the company exports 16 percent of its fabrics overseas to nations such as Chile, Argentina and Australia, Taylor said. Some of the fabric it sells to Mexico is made into furniture and sold back in the United States, he said.

Maryanne Cangiarella, a 17-year employee who lives in Egg Harbor City, is a weaver and supervisor. "I'm really proud to work at Absecon. We make a good fabric and quality product here," she said, a pair of scissors holstered in a belt around her waist.

Why come visit Absecon Mills?

"I guess the thing that immediately comes to mind is "welcome."

From the second I stepped foot in the door I felt as though I was right at home. From the sign that read Absecon welcomes "Rod Rodriguez" to the people that took time to sit down and meet with me. I just felt very much at home. Each person I met with brought so much knowledge and pride to the work that they did, and that went a long ways.

Walking on the floor the first thing we saw was the vendor score sheet which told me that everyone was focused on doing a great job for Sauder. Seeing that trophy displayed showed that Absecon was striving to be better for us!

I really appreciated the opportunity to come in and see the facility. I know that there are a lot of other people that are certainly envious of my trip!

Thanks a lot!"

*-Rod Rodriguez
Sauder Manufacturing*