

Industry - American Merchant

EARLY CHRISTMAS FOR BRISTOL, VA.

Firm to bring 405 jobs

Ex-Ball plant 'needle in haystack' for new owner American Merchant

BY DAVID MCGEE
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

BRISTOL, Va. — The Twin City beat out seven other states to land a 405-job textile manufacturing business, but finding the facility where it will operate was the "needle in the haystack."

That was the assessment Tuesday of Robert Burton, chairman of American Merchant, a U.S. subsidiary of Merchant House International, which plans to manufacture bath towels in the former Ball Corp. plant on Old Abingdon Highway.

The project was formally announced during a ceremony attended by Gov. Terry McAuliffe, other state and local dignitaries and Loretta Lee, chairman and

founder of Hong Kong-based Merchant House International.

State and city leaders touted the lengthy recruiting process and the cooperation needed to attract international manufacturing to Southwest Virginia. Burton said the building was a key deciding factor.

"When we came to Bristol, we had support from the governor, support from the community and the Tobacco bureau — but then we saw this building," Burton said. "They didn't manufacture textiles here, but Ball Corp. and the people who ran and



EARL NEIKIRK/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Robert Burton, chairman of the board of American Merchant, shows the layout that will be used in the factory in Bristol, Virginia, after the announcement on Tuesday by Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe. Virginia outbid seven other states for the firm.

BY THE NUMBERS
405

Number of jobs American Merchant will bring to Bristol, Va.

\$19.9 million

Company's investment in getting the business running.

200,000

Square footage of the former Ball Corp. facility.

SOURCE: American Merchant

Textile manufacturer makes 'high-quality' bath towels

BY ZACH IRBY
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

BRISTOL, Va. — Right now, luxury bath towels might not be on your radar when shopping for bathroom staples, but a new production facility in Bristol will bring soft, high-end towels a lot closer to home.

American Merchant, the newly

announced Bristol, Virginia, facility, gave the Bristol Herald Courier an inside look at the kinds of fabrics they'll be making at their plant.

"Most retailers out there have what is known as a good, better and best towel," said Robert Burton, chairman

See **TOWELS**, Page A14

Towels

From Page A1

of American Merchant. "We want to produce heavier, high-quality towels."

The towels produced at the Old Abingdon Highway facility will be sold in major retailers, including Bed, Bath and Beyond, Belk and other big-box stores, according to Burton.

"We have a long list of candidates, [and] we want to be able to put these towels into their stores," Burton said. "We don't want to play the game of providing low-quality and cheap [products]."

Towels produced by American Merchant will be made from 100 percent USA-quality cotton. The company will ship cotton into the facility from various states, including the Southeast region.

"Highland cotton and pima cotton are the two types of cotton used in the towel industry," Burton said. "The shorter staple cotton is what will be coming from this region of the country. The longer staple cotton will be brought in from the Midwest — from California and Arizona."

Most towels are made of cotton, but the look and feel depends on the type of cotton used. Towels designed for everyday use are made of standard cotton, while more expensive towels will have longer, more fibrous threads. Ultra-soft bath towels typically use Egyptian cotton or, increasingly, the American-grown version, called pima cotton, which offers a luxurious look and feel.

American Merchant's state-of-the-art production facility will make producing those high-end towels a lot easier, and all of it will be accomplished right in Bristol.

"We will buy the spun yarn and prepare the beams," Burton said. "After weaving the beams and the looms, you're inserting yarn, and it's a very high-speed insertion process that we will use to create the towels. We will then dye them and finish them onsite in the building."

zirby@bristolnews.com
276-645-2567

Facebook.com/ZachBHC
Twitter: @ZachBHC

BHC 13 Dec 2017