

# New Bristol woodworking plant begins production

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The first finished product manufactured at Peerless Woodworking Corp.'s new Bristol Tennessee location left the plant Friday, marking the official arrival of the 53-year-old family-owned business in the Twin City.

Wrapped and ready for delivery, the wood and laminate reception desk has been custom-made for Davis Memorial Hospital in West Virginia. Its finely detailed design and high-quality workmanship are an example of the many things yet to be produced here, said President and CEO Donald Jacobson.

"We're not taking any more business in Connecticut now," Jacobson said Friday. "As of now, Peerless Woodworking is based in Bristol."

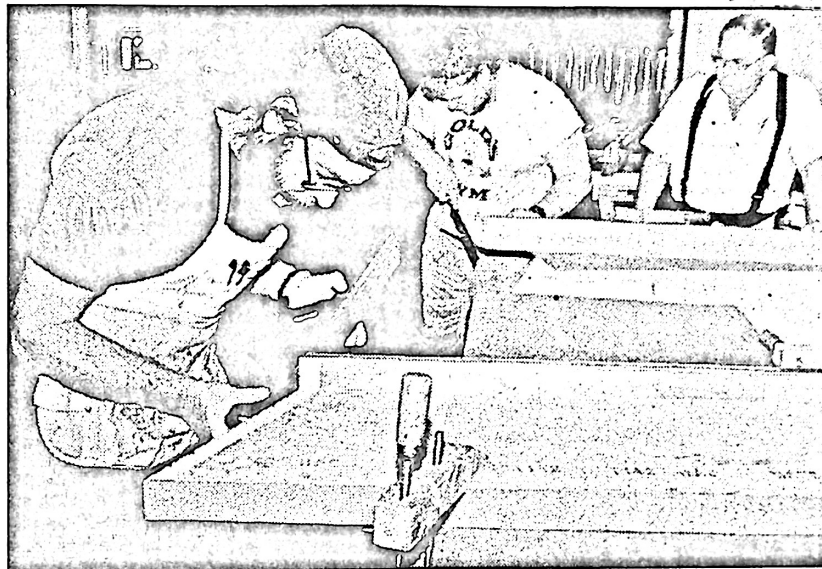
In the three months since Jacobson announced his intentions to move the busi-

ness from East Glastonbury, Conn., to Bristol, efforts to complete existing workloads at the Connecticut plant have been the top priority. Once equipment is no longer needed there, it is trucked to the Volunteer Parkway location and placed in the building that formerly served as a warehouse for Raytheon Corp.

"We're getting the equipment a few pieces at a time," Jacobson said. "We still have a lot of work to do before everything will be the way we want it. We're running about a month behind schedule, but I think I was being overly optimistic about how long it would take to relocate."

The massive operation includes design and engineering aspects, the actual cutting and shaping of materials, assembly and finishing. Each of these operations will be done in a different department of

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Herald Courier/Bill McKee

Michael Hofius, Walter Burton and Worley Eaton work Friday at Peerless Woodworking Corp.'s new Bristol Tennessee plant to complete the fitting and finishing of an order for shipment to a West Virginia hospital.

VF PEERLESS WOODWORKING BRISTOL HERALD Courier Oct. 16, 1993  
(COMPANY FILE)

## PEERLESS

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the plant, Jacobson said.

Because the plant is in transition, the number of employees is minimal. By March, however, Jacobson hopes to have 50 full-time permanent employees on his payroll and, by the end of three years, at least 100. "Right now I have about 15 on the payroll, and I think I've got 15 very happy people," Jacobson said. "We've hired some skilled cabinetmakers and others who don't know the first thing about woodworking. Two came from up North and the rest were from this area. And I believe that only one had a job when I hired him."

The average employee makes "well above the minimum wage," but salaries vary depending on the skill level of those hired, Jacobson said. Although no jobs have been advertised, the plant has been deluged with requests for applications, and more than

250 have been distributed, he said.

Preparation of the plant is also under way. Already, Jacobson has spent about \$250,000 preparing the building for its new use. A massive ventilation system, which draws the wood shavings out of the air — and out of the lungs of the workers — is being installed. And, because of the variety of functions performed at the plant, the interior is undergoing extensive renovations.

The basic shell will remain unchanged, but inside walls are being shifted to design office space and work areas, Jacobson explained. Electric wiring, formerly unavailable in sections of the plant, has been fed throughout the building.

Efforts to bring Peerless to Bristol began more than a year ago. Both Sullivan County and Bristol Tennessee industrial de-

velopment officials worked together and ultimately offered a \$125,000 loan that is forgivable if the 100-employee level is met at the end of three years.

Jacobson on Friday said he sees no problems meeting that goal. He is in the process of building a home here and is convinced his decision to come to Bristol was a good one.

"I personally was very convinced with the Bristol environment and community," Jacobson said. "There was never any doubt in my mind that Bristol and the Tri-Cities is a very good place to exist. I was a little worried about being able to find the kind of employees we need."

"At this point, though, I'm thrilled with the work force we've hired. In the group we've got, there are some who have an excellent attitude and others whose skill level is very good. Between the two, I know we can make it work."