

Business & Industry

No matter where you go, Kings Plush goes with you

The next trip you take on a major airline or bus look at the upholstery and carpets. Chances are it came from STI/Kings Plush in Kings Mountain.

Wayne King, president; Jim Brown, vice president and general manager; Mark Hovis, vice-president of manufacturing, and Joe Brinkmeyer, director of sales and marketing, have witnessed the transformation of the former K Mills on Marie Street from a manufacturer of residential velvet fabrics to a manufacturer of highly specialized transportation interior fabrics.

It all started in 1989 with Jacquard and dobby looms already in place and a workforce eager to produce a demanding quality, highly specified upholstery fabric to meet the demands of the transportation market.

STI is one of the most growing industries in Kings Mountain because of the new direction that meant continued success in the bus and coach textile industry, according to King.

With 100,000 square feet of manufacturing space and a three shift operation of dedicated and versatile employees, Brown says orders from new coach builders as well as Greyhound have increased.

King said in 1989 an unprofitable velvet supplier to the furniture trade called Kings Plush changed its name to Specialty Textile Interiors and went after the transportation fabric business. In 1993, he asked Sean and Bill Gibbons, who were part of a residential upholstery rep firm called Gaston, to take STI back into the residential furniture trade but in a more profitable way and they did.

King now reports that sales have almost tripled, with 1996 figures projected to top \$10 million. He said Gaston's 30-year history in the residential upholstery business opened doors and lent STI instant credibility when approaching furniture manufacturers in a very competitive market.

But King says a team effort by management and employees over the years have produced results.

"Our assets are the people who put their shoulders to it on the plant floor," he said.

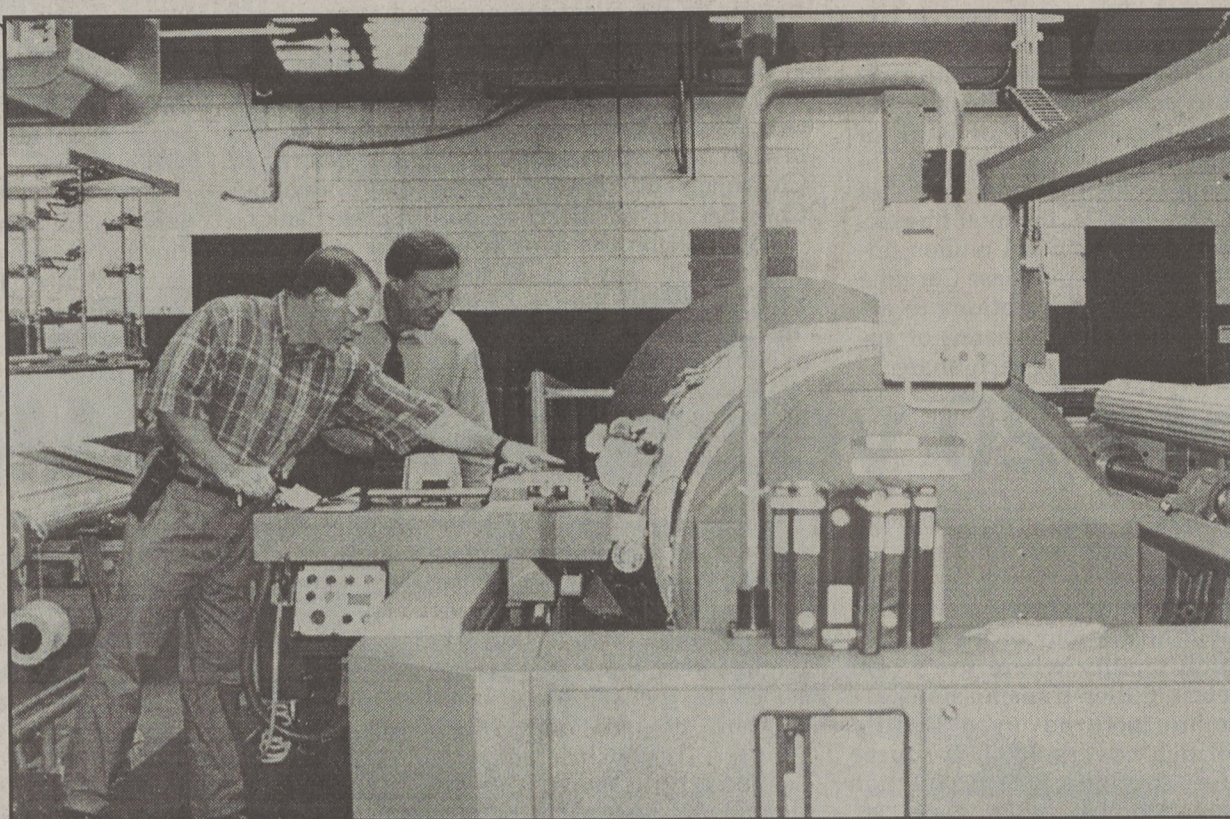
Manufacturers also highlight the company's effectiveness in working on custom designs and exclusive requests, says Brown.

One of the company's biggest advantages, noted Gibbons, is its background in styling and marketing.

"We can react to things quickly because of our CAD system and our looms. And I am so intimately involved in the design process I know exactly what's possible so it's easy for us to tweak designs to meet our customers expectations."

The local plant had its roots in Kings Mountain in 1964 as K Mill with Joe Kakassy as president. Hickory Springs operated the plant for five years from 1980-85 and Kings Plush came on line in 1985. STI has 87 employees, many of them from second and third generation Kings Mountain families. The diversified operation makes fabric and carpet for planes and trains and fabrics for cruise ships and for heavy over-the-road trucks. It also is big in a new residential furniture fabric line.

Fabric from the local plant was used in the refurbishing of two theaters in New York City and the company has markets



STATE OF THE ART EQUIPMENT - Rick Hahn, left, and STI President Wayne King are pictured at a sectional warper, new state of the art digital controlled equipment at STI/Kings Plush.

in both North and South America and exports its motor coach fabrics to New Zealand.

When its furniture line was introduced in 1994 STI merged with Kings Plush Inc.

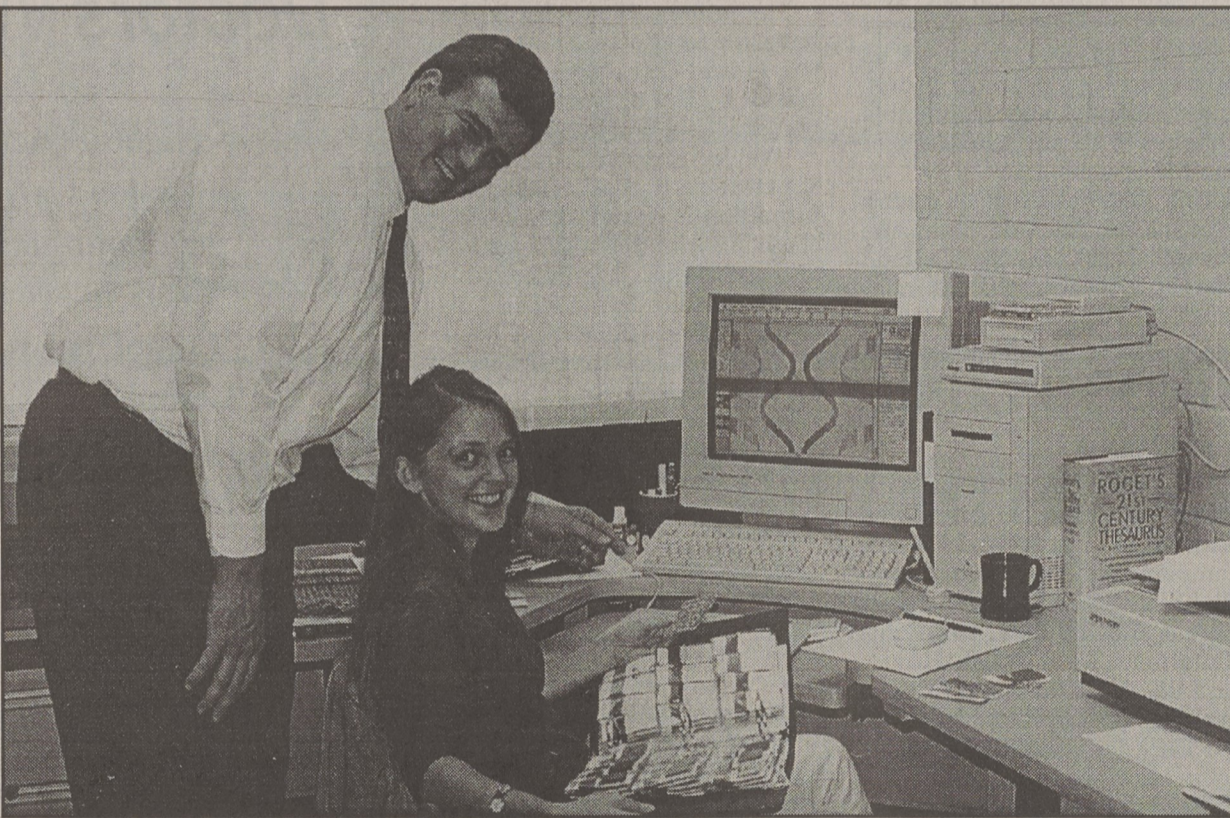
"The plant has undergone a real struggle over the years to survive but because of a flexible work force and cross training of employees we have stayed on top of it," said King, who commutes everyday from his home in Concord. King said that 70 percent of the plant has been refurbished with new state of the art equipment.

Most of the workers have been with the plant for many years and are Kings Mountain natives. David Oliver, manager of the weaving operation, is a 10 year employee. Jerry K. Jenkins, manager of dyeing and finishing, and Rick Hovis, director of manufacturing, are long term employees. King, who worked with Walsh previously and became a full time employee in 1989, Brown and Hovis formed a corporation in

See Kings Plush, 10-A



BUSY LOOMS - Ralph McDonald, left, and David Oliver work at the looms at STI/Kings Plush on Marie Street.



DESIGN COMPUTER - Charlotte Harbison, seated, and John Kay work at a design computer at STI/Kings Plush.

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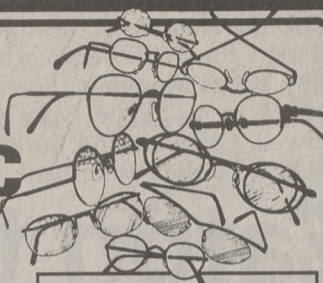
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