

Shifman upgrades N.J. facility

By David Perry

NEWARK, N.J. — The old is new again at Shifman Mattresses.

The high-end producer, whose complex here on the banks of the Passaic River includes a four-story, 19th-century brick building, has upgraded its facilities with a 24,000-square-foot addition that streamlines its operations, improves efficiency and boosts capacity. With 40% more space the producer can potentially triple its production, officials say.

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Mike, left, and Bill Hammer ride a forklift to check out mattresses in Shifman's expanded warehouse.

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Now CEO Mike Hammer and his son, Bill, who is president of the company, are poised to expand the dealer base and add volume, but only in the Shifman way.

Shifman, unlike many other bedding producers, has never been all about growth. The Hammers say their commitment to quality craftsmanship and the highest bedding materials will never change. While some producers can crank out a set of bedding in less than an hour, Shifman takes anywhere from eight to 12 hours to assemble a single set of bedding.

"We will stay true to our roots and our values," vows Bill Hammer, who joined the company full-time in 1994 and has been president since 2008. "We will never sacrifice those values for our revenue. Not many companies can say that. I will make sure that never changes."

Shifman, owned by the Hammer family since 1985, declines to disclose its volume, but is in a position to become



A worker uses the eight-way, hand-tied method to tie box springs together in Shifman's factory.

a significant bedding player, officials said. "We could be a \$70 million company," Mike Hammer said. "The potential is there."

Shifman does many things differently from other bedding companies. It's one of the only bedding producers to still garner its own cotton, using a process that dates back more than a century. It employs layer upon layer of cotton in its sleep sets, asserting that cotton adds superior resiliency, comfort and

durability. It still hand-tufts its mattresses, with its craftsmen threading long needles through the thick upholstery layers to sew them into place. And its box springs feature the classic eight-way hand-tied construction long favored in fine upholstery.

It all adds up, the company says, to "the finest handmade mattresses in the world."

But don't look for those mattresses at bedding specialty stores; Shifman doesn't sell that



Mike, left, and Bill Hammer show some of the fabrics that are destined for high-end beds in the Shifman Mattresses line.

fast-growing channel. Instead, the company prefers to focus on selling to fine furniture stores, retailers who appreciate Shifman's quality and its approach to doing business.

"We want to be the supplier of the finest quality, most comfortable bedding to stores that appreciate quality and craftsmanship and will be good partners to this company," Bill Hammer said. "We don't want to take business to increase our revenues. We want to find deal-

ers to partner with and to improve their business."

"We are not here to increase our market share," added Mike Hammer, the bedding veteran who bought Shifman in 1985, making a statement that few other producers would echo. "That has not been my priority. I have always wanted to do more business, but more business with the right people."

One of those right retailers is Bloomingdale's, the department store with which Shifman

has enjoyed a special relationship for years. "That is a perfect store for us," Mike Hammer said. "They like selling bedding. Their customers like quality and value. We make a completely unique line of bedding to appeal to the discriminating tastes of Bloomingdale's customers."

Among the exclusive features in Shifman's Bloomies line are titanium supports, cashmere, silk and wool comfort layers and hand-assembled Holland Maid inner-spring units.

Shifman is one of the nation's oldest bedding producers, founded in 1893. The company produces only two-sided bedding, a type of construction that is uncommon in the largely single-sided industry these days.

Its line starts at \$699, the heart of many producers' lines, and tops out at \$7,399, a price point far above the top of most manufacturers' lines. The best seller in the Shifman line, in units, is a bed retailing at \$1,299. The best seller in dollars is the Van Gogh in

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the company's Master's Collection, retailing for a hefty \$3,800.

"Our mattresses could be priced much higher, based on the craftsmanship, the materials we use and the longevity of our products" said Mike Hammer, who worked at Simmons and Stearns & Foster before moving over to Shifman. "We feel we have the best value at our price points. We could price some of our beds at \$20,000 or more, but that's not our philosophy."

Shifman's beds will last for years, far outperforming better-known bedding brands, the company says. A testing lab found that the company's two-sided mattresses stay truer to their original comfort level at least eight times

longer than leading brands. The test results show the leading brands suffering dramatic losses in comfort in just a few years.

Shifman is now stepping up its marketing efforts as it looks to expand its dealer base.

"I've got the easiest job in the world," said Jennifer Ritz, recently named marketing manager at Shifman. "I've got a real story to tell. Everything we do really is better. My job is to get that message out to the trade and to consumers. We will be talking not just about our features but about what they give you."

"You don't know what you are missing if you haven't tried a Shifman mattress," added Bill Hammer. "You don't know how well you can sleep."