

GIBBARD FURNITURE Co (con't)

investment which, properly cared for, holds or increases its value over the years an owner chooses to keep it.

Another new challenge for the company in recent months is cracking the American market. The move is already showing signs of some success, but even with Gibbard's proven quality record, it's coming head-to-head with major, brand-name and larger quality makers in the United States.

Some new production equipment technology for wood is also coming on-stream, but much of it is geared for such large-scale operations that it is not suitable for a small plant, said McPherson. There may be some opportunity to contract specific operations out to plants that invest in such equipment. There's also a new generation of water-based finish products for more environmentally friendly finishing treatments. Those must also be mastered to achieve the same quality.

Gibbard is already known from coast to coast in Canada. "Our sales tend to run about the same in all provinces," said McPherson, who added there are no factory sales. The furniture is sold in quality stores and some through Eaton's.

While graceful beauty is a hallmark of current patterns, the products are still quite subdued compared to ornate Victorian era sideboards and other items, when professional wood carvers at the plant created elaborate art designs on many items.

McPherson also noted that the plant's location, despite fires and rebuilding, is precisely the same. "We even used to have a channel from the Napanee River run under the plant for power for early water-powered saw mills."

Representative of the attachment and respect people have for such fine quality furnishings is an elderly Toronto woman who recently asked the company to take back a cherished antique sideboard because she wanted it "to return home."

"We paid her a fair price for it," said McPherson, who said the item will join others, both new and old, in the company showroom.

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