



Finishing Touches

King America fabric plant reopens in Screven County

When financial woes forced Spartan International to close its King America textile-finishing plant in rural Screven County in May 2001, some 230 stunned employees were suddenly unemployed. Among them was plant manager Warren Beck, who would spend the next seven months often frustrated by legal wrangling, yet vigilant in finding a new buyer and determined to see the 33-year-old plant reopen.

Finally, in December 2001, Westex Inc. purchased the facility. The Chicago-based company — a former customer of King America’s — supplies flame-resistant fabric to manufacturers of work garments for the petrochemical, electric utility and other industries where there’s a danger of combustion.

About 100 employees are now back to work at King America, and Beck is pleased with the effort put forth by those who shared his vision to keep the plant running. “We’ve asked people to do a lot of things we would not have asked them to do a couple of years ago,” says Beck, now president and CEO. “And people have responded. There’s no such



thing as my job or your job right now. Hopefully, with this kind of attitude, we’ll pull this off.”


Fortunately, Beck will have some help in pulling it off. Quick Start and Ogeechee Technical College will provide technical training in dye house operations, finishing, preparation and printing, as well as instructor training and pre-employment training. When fully operational, the plant will employ about 200 people, primarily from Screven, Bulloch and Jenkins counties.

At the recent training plan signing, Ogeechee Tech President Dr. Stephen A. Deraney applauded the plant reopening and praised King America for its perseverance. “Your

effort to protect jobs in a rural community is just phenomenal,” he said. “We’re pleased to be a partner, and pleased that Quick Start is able to take part, because jobs in Screven County are very important to us. What a success story this is — due to your hard work, enthusiasm and can-do attitude.”

Beck credits the new owners for supplying much of the zeal. The Renaldi family, owners of Westex since 1919, provided financial and moral support throughout the re-opening process. “Their enthusiasm is contagious,” he says. “Westex is a very close-knit family, and it’s a wonderful feeling to be associated with them.”

As part of that relationship, King America supplies fabric to Westex’s Chicago facilities, where the fire-resistant treatment is applied. King America also sells fabric to other customers in the apparel and home-furnishing industries.

The acquisition enables Westex to concentrate on its core business of flame-resistant technology. “The Westex principals look at [this plant] as a growth opportunity,” Beck says. “Their goal was to put people back to work and have a viable business. It’s good for all of us.” 



Present at the recent training plan signing were (standing, from left) David Russell, Ogeechee Tech VP of economic development; Donnie Saxon, King America HR manager; Michael Corbin, King America VP; Joel Martin, Department of Labor Career Center manager; and Ron Russell, Quick Start training coordinator. Seated are (from left) Stephen A. Deraney, Ogeechee Tech president; Warren Beck, King America president and CEO; and Richard Fountain, Quick Start project operations manager.