

AFG fiberglass signs deal with Taiwan textile giant

By KIP BURKE
news editor

A Washington fiberglass plant has signed a marketing agreement with a Taiwanese textiles giant to bring high-quality woven fiberglass fabrics to the North American market, a event that bodes well for the area's industrial prospects.

Washington and Wilkes County leaders gathered to see Madanjit "OB" Oberoi, president of AFG, USA, celebrate a new agreement with Dr. Georgo Ko, chairman of Baotek. Wilkes County Commission Chairman Sam Moore, Washington Mayor Ames Barnett, and other city and county leaders welcomed the delegation that traveled from Taiwan to Washington for the agreement, including Dr. Ko, Baotek President Dr. Bo Wang, and Baotek board of directors member Shawn Ko.

"We are a very proud company with good quality and good service, which we will bring over here," Baotek's Dr. Ko said. "We're very excited see Mr. OB's growth here and that he will bring our product to the world from here."

The agreement opens the door for opportunities to grow Wilkes County's established fiberglass and fabric industry, AFG USA's President OB Oberoi said. "On April 24 we signed a joint venture in which AFG will be the marketing agent for Baotek in North America. We anticipate a very rapid growth with Baotek's technology and AFG's cutting-edge marketing and sales globally. We feel that we will be able to make a great impact on the market, and take the sales to many, many millions of dollars."

"What AFG has decided to do is to join forces to leverage the synergies of the two companies," said Biren Oberoi, executive vice president of AFG. "Baotek is the number one producer of electronic fabrics in Taiwan. Their product goes into applications that go into printed circuit boards that go into iPads, iPhones and smart phones. Baotek controls 25 percent of the global market for notebooks and laptops – that's a pretty big company."

Alpharetta-based AFG, USA is 18 years old, and has operated at the former Standard-Coosa-Thatcher/SCT Yarns plant on Highway 47 in Washington-Wilkes for three years. "We've created jobs here, and we're going to create even more jobs, and this venture is a stepping stone to get us there," Biren Oberoi said. "AFG will warehouse its developed product right here in Washington and exponentially increase its imports through the port of Savannah, creating jobs in Washington, Savannah and in Alpharetta, AFG's headquarters. AFG expects these jobs to grow significantly."

Baotek President Dr. Bo Wang, whose familiarity with Washington-Wilkes industries goes back 15 years, told the assembled leaders that the new partnership is part of the trend of manufacturers moving plants from the Far East back to the United States. In China, he said, "the labor costs are very, very high now, so we're going see in the next three years, many manufacturers coming back to the United States because our strength of automation, our strength of management is going to make the difference."

In three years, Dr. Bo said, "we are going to see American products exported to China more than they come over here. Because I see that, we want to come back here earlier; we want to set our footprint here. We have a lot of people who have been all over the world, and know what it takes to come back here. We don't want the same-old, same-old products here, we want to bring the new industrial products here. We'll talk with OB to see what products we should be doing here, and how we can support him."

AFG's production of fiberglass mat product for industrial applications is already growing dramatically, OB Oberoi said. "By July, we should ship 22 truckloads, which should make us the biggest producer of fiberglass mat in North America. This is phenomenal – I never planned to be number one, but it is by the effort of everyone lowering costs and improving quality."

In addition, a new high-silica fiberglass product shows great promise, he said. "AFG is working on a new project with the U.S. military to make a fabric that will be able to withstand a continuous temperature of 1,800 degrees F. You can burn it, put fire to it for 36 hours, and it does nothing to it. We will be making this fabric here in this factory by workers in Washington and Wilkes County. It is a great application – and we will be the first people in America making silica fabric of 98.5 percent purity."

At the ceremony, Washington-Wilkes leaders welcomed the Taiwanese delegation. "This is a great day for Wilkes County," Chairman Sam Moore said. "We have a long history of textile and fiberglass production here, and we're really glad you chose Wilkes County."