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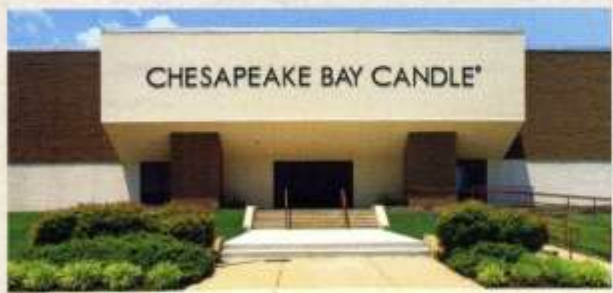
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>backstory

Can You Make It in the USA?

Chesapeake Bay Candles answers this burning question by opening a factory in Glen Burnie, MD. BY WARREN SHOULBERG



The ceremonial ribbon-cutting of the new 125,000-sq.-ft. plant in Glen Burnie, MD, which was accompanied by the burning of a ceremonial candle, was attended by more than 100 people, including state and local officials, employees and other guests. Doing the ceremonial honors are (l to r) Richard Zhu, VP of logistics; CEO David Wang and president Mei Xu and their two sons; and COO Dale Williams. The plant will be able to produce 2,500 candles an hour.

OPEN A CANDLE FACTORY IN THE UNITED STATES? You've either got to be crazy...or Mei Xu. Xu and husband David Wang are the co-founders of Chesapeake Bay Candle and earlier this year they did exactly that: Build and start making candles at a factory in Glen Burnie, MD, just outside of Baltimore.

The company, owned by the couple, was founded in 1994 and has up until now brought in its popularly priced candle line from Asia. It continues to operate three factories in Asia and also has a sister division, Bliss Living, that does Asian-inspired gifts, textiles and home accents.

The new 125,000-sq.-ft. plant will be able to produce 2,500 candles an hour, initially for its bigger customers like Target and Kohl's, and eventually for the Bliss Living line as well.

Wang said the initial reaction from others when he announced they were building a U.S. factory was largely skepticism. "People were amazed we were building a factory; they kept asking why. But I want to create jobs in this."

But there's more than just sentiment and patriotism behind the new U.S. factory, Wang said, pointing to the exchange rate that makes domestic production more competitive, as well as cutting shipping times and better quality control. "There's also a brand benefit: We're making Chesapeake candles by the Chesapeake Bay."

Xu said eventually the company expects to export its American-made candles to China and that it also hopes to establish an educational and retail component at the plant here. "This has been a long journey for us but this opening is a great and joyous occasion," she said at the ribbon cutting.

AN AMERICAN DREAM

"We came to this country very young with nothing but the American dream in mind," said Wang, at the grand opening celebration this past summer. "Now we want to do everything we can to pay back this country." Added Xu, "This is the beginning of Chesapeake Bay Candle's next chapter to become a true American brand."