

Fenton will continue glassmaking in Wood County – 12/05/07
By Keri Brown, WV Public Broadcasting

Lead: Glassmaking will continue at the Fenton plant in Wood County. Company president George Fenton made the announcement on Tuesday. But several changes are underway. Keri Brown Reports.

Brown: In August, Fenton Glass in Williamstown was on the verge of closing. The company announced that it would be wind down operations in October. Company President George Fenton says that never happened because a surge in orders and renewed interest in the glass helped turn things around.

Fenton: It was a surge of orders happened because message of going out of business short term so restructured for profitability at a smaller size and that's the major difference long-term.

Brown: The restructuring plan includes reducing the number of Fenton dealers by more than half, to about a thousand. The number of employees has also been cut. In August, around 150 people worked at the plant, now that number is 120. Fenton says he's not ruling out any future job cuts, but for now, he has no plans to reduce his staff. The news of Fenton staying open has Williamstown mayor Jean Ford excited.

Ford: This is an early Christmas Present for the Williamstown area.

Brown: She says everyone on both sides of the river has been buzzing about the news.

Ford: It's good for the entire region, Marietta is just below us. A lot of our businesses depend on them. They bring in lots of people. It's wonderful.

Brown: Another major step in the restructuring is a change in the Fenton art glass line. Fenton says the number of pieces made each year will be reduced.

Fenton: The production will be on a smaller scale. We are sticking to the things that we do best like figurines and special orders. Some colors may not be produced all at once. This will help keep energy costs down

Brown: Fenton spokesman James Measell says although the company is moving forward, everyone remains cautious.

Measell: Right now things look good that's true, but right now we are taking orders for our Spring line through December 24th from our dealers for glassware. If the volume of orders substantial and produced successfully then we could take a step of addition to line look at fall and Christmas. We can't get too excited we are critical and recovering. With any recovery, you have the possibility of relapse and you have to be cautious and not take things too fast too soon.)

Brown: Meanwhile, the company will continue to work on reducing its debt over the next several months. Fenton didn't receive any financial assistance from the state but George Fenton says the company is talking with state officials for additional opportunities. A series of auctions are also in the works. Several pieces that have been stored away in offices and throughout the factory will be up for sale in February.

For West Virginia Public Broadcasting, I'm Keri Brown in Bethany.

