

Craftmaster begins 50th year celebrations this spring



Jean Marie Layton // Senior Editor for Upholstery • *March 15, 2022*



Jack Stokes (l) and Steve Lackey (r) founders of Craftmaster Furniture

TAYLORSVILLE, N.C. — Craftmaster Furniture celebrates its 50th anniversary this year with new introductions at April's High Point Market and a larger celebration planned for October's market.

"Our goal is the same as it was 50 years ago, developed by our founders Steve and Jack. It was to build the best quality products that are affordable, yet fashion forward and comfortable," said Roy Calcagne, president and CEO of the company since 2006.

At this April's High Point Market, the company will be featuring 10 new collections — three leather and seven fabric — as well as six new accent chairs. Craftmaster will also introduce 40 new fabric combinations in its showroom that has more than 100 vignettes.

Calcagne noted the introductions are a little lighter than normal to focus on filling gaps in the company's product lines and making sure introductions are available to vendors by September.

"We have become known for having a great fabric selection with more than 800 choices available on 75 different collections and accent pieces. I am very proud to have been part of this great company for the past 16 years and to be able to work with a team of professionals that are second to none," added Calcagne.

NC beginnings, NC present day

Craftmaster was started by Steve Lackey and Jack Stokes in 1972 in downtown Taylorsville, N.C. Staffed with friends and family who had worked in upholstery manufacturing, the company also included sales reps who would travel throughout the South to line up customers. Eventually, the company grew to more than 400 employees and established itself as a supplier of moderate to upper moderately priced furniture.



A Craftmaster original 1972 sofa design

In 2006, Samson Holdings purchased the company to add to its brands including Legacy Classic and Universal Furniture. Since then, Craftmaster has doubled in revenue and employs more than 750 with a 1-million- square-foot manufacturing space in western N.C. and an additional facility in Lenoir purchased in September 2021.

The 400,000-square-foot facility was necessary due to volume and labor crunches. According to Calcagne, "We tapped out the workforce in Alexander County and opened our facility in Lenoir. We now have 150 employees in that facility who can produce another \$500,000 in furniture each week."

The company still uses hardwood plywood and 2.0 density foam in all its products. Current customers include direct to consumer, to the trade and more than 700 brick-and-mortar retailers east of Dallas. The company was on the West Coast; however, a combination of high freight and lower volume in the West had the company realign its priorities.

“Our retail partners know the quality level and the service we provide,” said Calcagne. The company has created lifestyle segments for its products including Casual Retreat (slipcovered pieces) and Loft Living for a younger consumer, first time purchaser or smaller home/condo downsizer.

One of the driving forces along with other industry partners, Craftmaster helped to establish the Catawba Valley Furniture Academy to provide furniture manufacturing training. Some of the program’s trainers are senior upholsterers at Craftmaster. The company helps to support the program by providing fabric and frames as well.

Commitment to people

Calcagne noted that in its 50 years of business, the company has never had a layoff. During COVID, the company shut down in May 2020, put employees on furlough and paid full wages for two weeks before government payments started. The move cost the company \$1 million, and it continued to pay health insurance premiums during that time.

When the company restarted operations, it ended up hiring people who were laid off from other manufacturers in the area. “People are your biggest asset,” said Calcagne. “We wanted to make this the place where people want to come to work.”

Overall, wages have gone up 20% to 25%, and the company 401(k) match went up. As additional support for employee financial awareness, the company engaged coaches and hosted seminars with 401(k) companies.

More to come

Craftmaster will be celebrating with a large “thank you” event for its dealers planned for the October market, which will also include replicas of some of the company’s original introductions as well.

The company’s High Point Market showroom is located at 2622 Uwharrie Road.