



FIT USA Celebrates Opening of New Facility in Jefferson City, Tennessee

Jefferson City, TN – Governor Haslam first announced the opening of Footwear Industries of Tennessee, Inc (FIT USA) in September 2013, and today, just 9 months later, the company marked the occasion of its grand opening with a ribbon cutting celebration. The 40,000 square foot plant, which is located in the Jefferson City Industrial Park, is manufacturing a line of men's work and hunting boots.

"We are thrilled that this exciting day is finally here," said Ms. Loretta Lee, the founder of The Merchant House International Group, FIT USA's parent company. "By expanding our international presence to Jefferson City, TN we will be better positioned to serve our customers and the United States market. This is a terrific location for our company because it is centrally located and makes distribution convenient."

"We have committed over \$5 million to the first phase of this project, and we will continue to invest in manufacturing in America," continued Lee. "We intend to triple the business in the next two years with the goal of having 25 percent of our shoes Made in America. I believe this is only the beginning, and we will be encouraging other supply-related industries to invest in re-shoring to America."

FIT USA has hired 50 employees, and plans to hire a total of 109 in the next three months. Many of the employees are experienced sewing machinists and material cutters, having worked previously in the apparel industry in East Tennessee. FIT USA is also operating a state-of-the-art, direct-injection molding machine to fabricate the soles of the boots.

"We are tickled to welcome Footwear Industries of Tennessee to Jefferson City. It will be making footwear which will be sold everywhere in the USA, and is bringing new jobs to our city," said Jefferson City Mayor Mark Potts. "The citizens of Jefferson County

have a work ethic without parallel and they will help to make this company a successful business and a great corporate citizen."

The Footwear Division of The Merchant House International Group was established in 1980. Initially specializing in work boots, it diversified in 2003 and began manufacturing American-style western boots. The Division operates two shoe factories and in recent years has added production lines to increase capacity to over five million pairs of shoes annually. The company has moved production of a footwear line from its headquarters in Tianjin, China to Jefferson City with the goal of shortening manufacturing lead times and reducing inventory overhead for its customers. This "re-shoring" of production demonstrates the Group's commitment to more sustainable manufacturing and to returning jobs to America.

Among the featured speakers at today's event was Mr. Scott Ramsland, Vice-President and General Merchandising Manager of Sears Holdings Corporation. Sears was the first to commit to The Merchant House International Group's Made in the USA project at its inception.

In addition, The Merchant House International Group supplies many of the major US retail chains, and has received "Supplier of the Year" awards on a number of occasions from its customers. It also makes safety- and non-safety outdoor shoes for a variety of nationally recognized brands.

"I want to welcome FIT USA to Jefferson County, Tennessee and thank them for their investment here," said Jefferson County Mayor Alan Palmieri. "The decision by Merchant House International to move production to Jefferson County proves that global companies are closely evaluating the costs of manufacturing overseas, and the fact that our workers can compete with anyone, anywhere."

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