

Made in the U.S.A.: Production moves here from overseas

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Jerry and Loretta Murphy have a can-do attitude in the midst of diminishing U.S. factory activity and vanishing manufacturing jobs. Instead of importing a product from overseas and selling it here, they want to manufacture something here and market it in other countries.

"The Latin America market is wide open, and so is Europe," Jerry Murphy said.

So what's the product the Murphys have started making at their facility in Broken Arrow? It's something that almost everyone needs — the age-old ironing board.

But the product is not the one most folks have crammed inside a closet or leaning against a wall in a laundry room. Jerry Murphy said it's a high-end, custom-crafted board that remains concealed in wall-mounted birch, oak or scratch-resistant white cases until needed.

The board and its cabinet are sold as a unit.

The couple purchased Hide-Away Ironing Boards Inc. last fall, folding the 17-year-old company into C&A International, the kitchen product business they started in 2008. C&A has imported items such as trash caddies, pop-up clothes racks and laundry hampers from Asia and England and distributed them here.

The former owners of Hide-Away outsourced its production overseas, but the Murphys moved the manufacturing here in April.

"We had the machinery to produce the boards right here," Jerry said. "We wanted to label them as 'Made in the USA' and stay here if at all possible. I would rather put people to work here who need to work."

The Murphys already have invested about \$2 million to revamp the production area to make it more efficient. They also created a new board with a special hinge that allows it to swivel 360 degrees.

"I saw it as a good opportunity for my future," Jerry said, noting that his plan is to build Hide-Away into a bigger company. There are 30 employees now, "but I feel comfortable we can get that number up to 80, with two shifts."

The boards are sold at home improvement retailers Lowe's and Home Depot, and retail for between \$169 and \$179.

Besides getting ironing boards into more stores, Jerry said the company's growth is expected to come from marketing the product to hotels and adding items to C&A International's line.