

I'm not robot!

Sligh workers sad, not shocked at closing Thursday, May 12, 2005 By Rob Kirkbride The Grand Rapids Press HOLLAND -- In its 125 years, Sligh Furniture Co. has made everything from bicycles to bedroom sets. Like other companies with such longevity, it has survived by evolving. This time, the fourth-generation family company will adapt by exiting West Michigan and dropping one of its best-known product lines. It will stop producing clocks later this year and will ship all its furniture production out of the United States. Wednesday's announcement by company President Rob Sligh may have surprised many in the area, but it came as no shock to its remaining 75 employees. It also did not surprise industry experts, who watched the company move production from its West Michigan roots to follow cheap labor in places such as Mexico, Philippines, China and Indonesia. The move is symptomatic of the U.S. thirst for cheap products pouring out of China and other Asian countries, said Jim Koeman, who worked for Sligh for more than 32 years. "If I'm angry about anything, I'm angry about the mindset of American people who are willing to settle for less money simply so we can have more things," said Koeman, who started at Sligh on his 18th birthday. "We are all to blame." The U.S. residential furniture industry -- which once had a major role in the Grand Rapids area economy -- continues to contract under pressure from low-cost overseas manufacturing, said Harold Rodenhouse, retired president of Hekman and Superior furniture companies. "All furniture making in the U.S. is in transition because of the opportunity to buy offshore for so much less than the cost to produce it here," he said. "Sligh is one of those traditional old furniture makers that has stuck it out for a long time." The end of production at Sligh this fall marks the end of another chapter in West Michigan's furniture legacy. In recent years, Baker Furniture Co. moved production from Holland, and the John Widdicombs Co. plant, dating to the Civil War, closed in Grand Rapids. But unlike those companies, Sligh's history is marked with sudden and dramatic changes management took to stay alive. Sligh had more than 1,500 employees in 1933 when it moved from Grand Rapids to Holland, opening there with 45 workers. The company shifted from bedroom suites to desks. Later, it made dorm furniture to supply growing college campuses. When that market dried up, Sligh picked up Trend Clock Co. in Zeeland for \$1, turning it into one of the largest clock makers in the world. "The company needed a replacement for that volume," Rob Sligh said in describing the transition from dorm furniture to clocks. "The 1970s provided a great growth market that came at the right time." When the clock market started to slow, Sligh shifted to home-office furniture. Most recently, the company entered the home-entertainment furniture market in 2002. "There have been lots of twists and turns in our 125-year history," said Sligh, the fourth-generation leader of the firm. Among those are the shifting of manufacturing from Holland to other countries. A few years ago, Sligh had more than 400 workers. When the 250,000-square-foot plant and offices are idled in September, the company will employ 23 workers locally in management, engineering, marketing and customer relations. The hardest part is the loss of longtime employees, Sligh said. "I've known some of the employees here all my life," he said. "They were here when I was a kid in knickers who came to see my dad. And when I was a teen working in every department in the plant and getting sawdust in my shoes, some of those people are still here." The hardest part is talking with our people about a future that doesn't involve them." Sligh told workers Wednesday morning of the closing. Fidel Mireles, who has worked there 31 years, said the few weeks leading to the closing would be difficult. "They treated my family good over the years," he said, noting three sisters, two sisters-in-law, his sons and a few nephews worked at the company during his career. Sligh also will have to say goodbye to many longtime clock customers and dealers. One retailer of Sligh clocks in Holland said the decision was a loss for the grandfather clock industry. "I'm certainly saddened because there was a day when the (Sligh) clock division was the real money maker for them," said John Loomis at Teerman's. "I have sold Sligh and sold it well over the years." Teerman's carries several models of Sligh grandfather clocks, the highest-priced model costs about \$10,000. Sligh and Howard Miller clocks, also sold at Teerman's, earned a reputation as high-quality grandfather clocks. Buzz Miller, president of Howard Miller Clock Co. in Zeeland, still sees clock-making as a viable business. "It's a product people want when they see it. But consumers have a lot of choices these days," he said. The furniture industry has undergone a radical change in the past decade, as manufacturers continue to follow low wages around the globe. But that does not make it easier for those left behind. Holland Mayor Al McGeehan was saddened by Sligh's announcement. Rob Sligh called him late Tuesday to break the news. "Sligh has been a part of Holland for eight decades and here in this part of West Michigan for (more than) a century," McGeehan said. He asked whether there was anything the city could do to "soften" the impact and possibly keep jobs, but "it sounds like the operations are already in the Philippines and China." Sligh's news came in the afterglow of the announcement last month that Johnson Controls Inc. planned to add 525 jobs to its Lakewood plant with a new product line. When told of the news at the Tulip Time Governor's Luncheon, Gov. Jennifer Granholm said Sligh's decision was another reason for the state to develop high-tech industries to replace manufacturing. "This is an example of an evolving world," she said. "West Michigan has been a manufacturing center, but businesses are moving to lower-cost countries. It's clear we have to concentrate on growth areas where we can be competitive." Press staff writer John Tunison contributed to this story. © 2005 Grand Rapids Press. Used with permission by Danielle Smyth Updated February 22, 2021 Grandfather clocks are a symbol of Americana, but their roots come from other parts of the world. They are cultural artifacts that convey an aura of strength, authority and lasting beauty regardless of the grandfather clock style. To determine the age of a grandfather clock, you'll need to learn more about this sort of antique. BookishGirls describes how the first mechanical clock was invented by Henry de Vick around 1360 A.D, but it only struck on the hour. The first pendulum clock arrived in the 1600s, paving the way for Christopher Huygens's long case clock in 1656. It was named a "grandfather clock" afterward. There are nine different kinds of antique clocks, as described by Gary R. Sullivan Antiques. The most familiar style, the grandfather clock, is usually about 8 feet tall. Other categories of antique clocks include banjo, shelf, Grafton, bracket, lighthouse, dwarf, mirror and tavern clocks. None of these are quite as towering and majestic as true grandfather clocks, however. Bornholm grandfather clocks were produced on the Danish island of Bornholm from 1745 to 1900. They have delicate (usually square-shaped) crowns with tiny windows on either side. Empire grandfather clocks are a category of Bornholm and have white faces made from iron, black numbers and simple brass hands. You may find the clockmaker's name or their initials on the back. The well-known Comtoise/Morez/Morbier grandfather clocks are from the Franche-Comté region of France and were built from the 1680s until around 1890. There were approximately 60,000 made each year. These weight-driven clocks went through different style phases. Some of the long cases are shaped like violins, while others are more traditional-looking. Some of the original dials were made with pewter or brass and black numbers, but later ones had enamel cartouches (carved tablets) or printed paper. Other Comtoise clocks featured pierced brass pediments (triangles) that looked like roosters, flowers, sunbursts or cornucopias. These delicate details can make these clocks quite valuable. Mora grandfather clocks were made in a town of the same name, which is situated in the Dalarna province of Sweden. These grandfather clocks feature long, slender bodies and can be up to 99 inches tall. They have cast-iron weights and eight-day movements. The three familiar Mora clocks are Fryksdall (beautiful carvings), country (simple hood crowns) and city (fine, elegantly painted). There are many clockmakers who build modern grandfather clocks, but these are not as highly valued as rare antique ones. Foter explains that antique grandfather clocks are made from wood, while modern styles can be made from metal and other materials and can look very contemporary. If you have an antique grandfather clock and want to figure out how old it is, Our Pastimes recommends looking for the manufacturer's name first. Start by checking out the face and dial of the clock, as the manufacturer's name may be engraved or painted there. You may also find a copyright symbol or trademark near the dial. To look further, open the hood (the top part); you may need to open a latch. The inside working mechanism may have a nameplate or identifying numbers. Grandfather clocks that are made with solid parts, like bronze, are more sought after, and another feature that gets buyers' attention is when the inner mechanism is technically impressive. Some grandfather clocks have to be wound daily, while others can go for eight days. Some even play a grandfather clock song, and others may have moving figurines. As one would easily guess, grandfather clocks that are in poor condition will not fetch good prices; discoloration, cracks, chips or signs of repair could put it in the "good" condition category. Excellent condition would signify some minor flaws, and the top of the heap - mint condition - means that the clock is basically perfect, with no cracks, missing pieces or repairs. According to Kersten's Antiques, there are several factors that determine an antique clock's value. First is the manufacturer, and identification of the manufacturer can require some investigation if the clock is not marked. If you can trace its origins and even determine the previous owner, this could add to the clock's historical significance and value. Manufacturer reputation is also important. Antique HQ states that some of the best 19th-century grandfather clock manufacturers include Junghans, Seth Thomas, Sessions, New Haven, Howard Miller, En Welch, Ingraham, Waterbury, Ansonia and Gilberts. Most of these are/were American companies, but a few are from the Black Forest region of Germany. If you find an important clockmaker's signature on your clock, the value will be higher. Authenticity and rarity also drive up a grandfather clock's worth. Collectors do not usually go for modern reproductions, so it is essential to verify that the clock is the real thing; an antique appraiser can help with this. If a particular clock was produced in small numbers or if there are not many on the market, you will also do better. Savage & Polite's Antique Clocks Identification & Price Guide is useful for identifying, dating and pricing grandfather clocks. They explain that clocks can be dated by style, manufacturer, serial and patent numbers, trademarks and labels. They list different styles of antique clocks and when they were introduced. The website also has a large, searchable database for antique clocks. You can enter the name of the manufacturer and go from there. If you cannot identify your grandfather clock, they also have a list of sources that can help you with the research. Serial numbers are not that common on antique clocks. The following companies used them: Atmos Bulle Chelsea Clock Company E. Ingraham Company Gustav Becker Herschede Hall IBM/ITR Time Clocks Japy Freres Jean Vincenti & Co. Lenzkirch If you have checked the grandfather clock value guide and feel that your clock is worth something, you can try selling it yourself online. This can be complicated, though, because a potential buyer may want to see it in person. Shipping grandfather clocks can be expensive since they have to be packed very carefully. Antique dealers might be interested in your grandfather clock but will pay you less than the price for which they plan to sell it. They may be able to transport the clock and make any repairs, which will be factored into their pricing. If they want to offer you a consignment deal and take a percentage of the sale, get a written agreement that specifies the length of the consignment time, the commission and other details. Auction houses may also accept grandfather clocks on consignment. They charge sellers a commission, which could be anywhere from 10 to 40 percent of the final selling price. Additional fees for shipping, photography and insurance may also be charged. For more information, you can contact the National Association of Watch & Clock Collectors or the Horological Foundation.

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