

Hat company heads home to Watsonville



DAN COYRO — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Garth and Gary Watrous have moved the family hat business, Head'n Home, from Larkin Valley to a larger Watsonville site.

Family owned Head'n Home offers discounts during city factory sale

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WATSONVILLE » When it came time to find larger quarters for their specialty hat company, Gary and Garth Watrous looked as far afield as Texas and Oklahoma.

But the father and son settled on Watsonville, just down the road from the rural Larkin Val-

ley property where they've run Head'n Home since 1989.

"It's so much cheaper everywhere else," Gary Watrous said. "But this is home. This is where our roots are."

Saturday, the public can visit the family owned company's new home at 125 Aviation Way during the city's annual Holiday Factory Sale.

More than a dozen businesses will open their doors dur-

ing the sale. Several car dealerships along Auto Center Drive plan to donate \$100 to Jacob's Heart Children's Cancer Support for every vehicle sold during the day.

Head'n Home will offer a 25 percent discount on a line of leather hats that come in a wide range of styles, from steampunk to cowboy.

"We're all about quality, uniqueness and innovation,"

said Garth Watrous, adding that the hats have to be well made as they come with a lifetime guarantee.

Gary Watrous founded the company. He started selling his handmade leather belts and purses at craft fairs in the 1970s. He shifted his focus to hats after receiving compliments on the first one he made for himself, and he later purchased a

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Live Oak hat company.

Today, the company sells mostly wholesale, though some marketing continues at fairs.

In the 1980s and '90s, when other companies moved production to China, Head'n Home, stayed local. Garth Watrous said the decision forced the company to compete with hats produced at lower cost. He said if it had been up to him, he probably would have moved across the Pacific Ocean as well. His father vetoed the idea.

"It was against my principles," Watrous said. "It was not only about American made, but also I wanted control of the quality."

As a result, "We treaded water for many years," his son said. A combination of increasing global interest in quality headgear and the rising cost of manufacturing in China finally helped put the company back on track, Garth Watrous said.

Now the company ships thousands of hats each month to China, Head'n Home's biggest overseas market. Its growth has outpaced space on the factory floor, limiting the company's ability to reach its full



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Head'n Home is leaving Larkin Valley for a larger space on Aviation Way in Watsonville.

potential, Garth Watrous said. In Watsonville, they'll have room to expand — and, he said, they'll have to grow to make the move worthwhile.

Head'n Home is leasing 15,000 square feet in the city-owned building across from the Watsonville Municipal Airport terminal for \$9,163 a month for five years with an option to renew for another five.

Garth Watrous said the company is in the process of beefing up its sales team, and he wants to grow from 29 employees to 40 by the end of 2015.

HOLIDAY FACTORY SALE

What: Watsonville businesses offer discounted merchandise at annual sale.

When: 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday.

Where: Annieglass, 310 Harvest Drive; S. Martinelli & Co., 345 Harvest Drive; El Pajaro CDC Commercial Kitchen, 412 Riverside Drive; Bamboo Chef, Klub Nico and LaSelva Designs, 32 Mariposa Ave.; Head'n Home, 125 Aviation Way; Wonderfully Raw, 9 Hangar Way, Suite 1B; Bunter Springs Winery, Kissed by an Angel Wines, Myka Cellars, Roudon Smith and Wargin Wines, 18 Hangar Way; Nomi Fabrics, 26 C Hangar Way; Photoflex, 97 Hangar Way; Smith & Vandiver, 480 Airport Blvd.

Details: cityofwatsonville.org.

The new headquarters also will feature a 936-square-foot retail store. "We're going from 7,000 to 15,000 square feet overnight," he said. "It's a little scary, but we're excited about the challenge."