

45 years and counting of 'Luxury Lingerie'

Company has been manufacturing since 1968

By TODD GUILD
OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN
WATSONVILLE — This longstanding Watsonville business has got you covered.

Farr West Fashions, which bills itself as offering "luxury lingerie for life," has been manufacturing its unique brand of undergarments here since the late 1960s.

The business was launched in 1968 by Jack and Iris Farr, first in Mountain View, then in Palo Alto.

They moved to Watsonville to be close to their production plant in 1982, then opened their



own factory in 1991.

Those years saw business increase, and at one point the company was manufacturing for customers that included Victoria's Secret, until that company and many others shifted its suppliers to overseas manufacturers.

That's a trend Farr West has been battling since retail companies began looking for

ways to reduce costs and boost profits by moving their operations out of the country.

In the interim the company has seen its sales fluctuate between \$3 million in the early '90s to \$700,000 last year, and is now battling its way back from a low in 2008, when the economy crashed.

"It's been rough," said Chuck Farr, who with his sister became co-president in 2002. "Many people are still surprised that there is still a garment producer in America."

Overseas producers, which offer cheap labor, have also made it nearly impossible to compete in lingerie such as panties and bras, Farr said.

Still, Farr West held on to its main customers that include

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Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

Tin Wan unfurls a length of satin charmeuse Monday at Farr West Fashions, a luxury lingerie business in Watsonville.

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Teresa Diaz prepares an order of half slips for shipping.

LINGERIE

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Bloomingdales, Lord & Taylor and more than 250 women's lingerie specialty stores nationwide. In addition, Nordstrom department stores sells the products from its website, as do the Internet companies herroom.com and lingerieidiva.com.

In fact, the company has seen a growing number of sales shift toward buyers who use its own website, farrwest.com, including a woman who ordered from an address next door to the company, not knowing the lingerie company was her neighbor. That customer was surprised when Farr himself delivered the order.

"We have a pretty loyal clientele," Farr said.

Those slips are made from a unique satin that contains anti-cling properties, and through a process that utilizes the strongest part of the fabric's fibers, which Farr said values quality over quantity and profit.

The company also produces camisoles, teddies and "pettipants," but has retained its hold on the industry by specializing in items such as slips and half-slips. Those products are



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A line of slips are ready for shipment at Farr West Fashions.

declining in use among lingerie wearers but nevertheless are still in demand among professional women from 30-60. Customers have included former Washington State Sen. Olympia Snowe and former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Farr said.

"There is a real legacy to it," Farr said of having taken the reins from his parents. "It's something to uphold. It's a family business, and that became more important as the years went on. We have a really good name in the industry."

Iris Farr attributed the com-

pany's success in part to its 12 employees, most of whom have been making lingerie by hand for more than 10 years. Five of them, she said, have been with Farr West for two decades.

She also tipped her hat to her husband, who she said traveled to retailers across the country to help establish the Farr West name.

"I'm amazed," she said. "We have had a really good run of business."

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For information, or to order, visit www.farrwest.com or call 800-848-7891



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Chuck Farr, co-president of Farr West Fashions, inspects an inventory of slips and half slips Monday.