

IS LUCY THE BEST
DOGGIE EVER?

READ IT AND WEEP, PAGE 52

WHAT YOUR DENTIST CAN
READ IN YOUR TEETH

READ IT AND FLOSS, PAGE 58

THE HOMES ISSUE

4 RE-DO HOW-TOS

PAGE 22

The Roanoker

METROPOLITAN ROANOKE LIFESTYLE

Cupcake Wars!

32

DUMB
THINGS

DUBIOUS
ACHIEVEMENT
AWARDS

Page 40

April 2013

\$3.50



LAISSEZ LES BON TEMPS ... CAJUN! PAGE 72

PICK YOUR
FAVORITE FROM
BUBBLECAKE &
VIVA LA CUPCAKE
PAGE 66



Trusses to Japan, Cables to Australia: **INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS** from Roanoke

The Roanoke area exported \$1.5 billion worth of goods and services in 2010 – up 15.7 percent from a year earlier and about four times the impact of tourism on our economy. **BY RANDOLPH WALKER**

On a chilly day in December, wind whips through the open doors of the cavernous, 140,000-square foot plant of Timber Truss in Salem. Two forklift drivers are maneuvering a 30-foot-long bundle of pinewood floor trusses into a shipping container. Three other containers will be loaded with roof trusses, windows, doors, exterior siding, stairs, lighting fixtures, sinks and cabinets.

“Pretty much it’s an entire church,” says Gary Saunders, Timber Truss president.

From Timber Truss, the containers will be trucked to Ohio, then placed on rail cars for shipping to Los Angeles. A crane will swing them onto a transoceanic freighter. Then, after three weeks sliding up and down the long swells of the Pacific, they’ll be offloaded in Sendai, Japan.

With the U.S. economy still sluggish, Timber Truss is going after the export market. Saunders hopes to be sending 600-foot home kits to South America.

“Chile has a robust economy,” he says. “That country is growing. We’re waiting any day for a purchase order from Chile we hope to get. Chile is great for us because normally in the wintertime when [domestic sales are] depressed because of rain and snow, they’re in the height of their summer.”

Inside the mountain walls that ring the Roanoke Valley, factories and offices are producing housing components, shoe inserts, chemicals, locks, software and many other products that will be trucked, shipped, flown and emailed to the four corners of the globe. Export is big in the Roanoke Valley.

“There are actually quite a few companies in the area engaged in international business, much more than the average Roanoker knows or could guess about,” says Paul Ehrlich, international trade manager for the Virginia Economic Development Partnership’s South Central region, which includes Roanoke.

According to the Brookings Institution’s “Export

One to Watch: GEN Works to Make Big Farming Safer

From a rambling, nondescript building in an unpretentious business-residential section of northeast Roanoke, a company called Green Earth Naturally is trying to change the world.

"GEN's vision is to create products and service technologies to help supply the world with clean air, water and food," the company's mission reads, in part.

That's a tall order, admits Carroll Hale, vice president and director of research and development. But he's got some products that could go a long way toward making that vision a reality.

Hopes are high for several products including OptiDiesel, a fuel additive which reduces emissions and improves fuel efficiency in diesel engines and generators. Growth could be spectacular if GEN can get it "leveraged off the ground," says Hale.

Prospects for highway use in the United States aren't good, due to the Environmental Protection Agency. "They're taking a dim view of anything that's not already grandfathered in, even though we've proven that it helps the environment." Surprisingly, the approval process in Europe is more streamlined. GEN already has distributors in the EU and hopes to be selling there this year. GEN is also working on a deal in Nigeria to have all diesel fuel treated with OptiDiesel.

Another GEN product with possibilities in Nigeria is BLOC (Biological Liquid Odor Control), which treats biological wastes, and BLOC Plus, which also repels insects. GEN's Nigerian distributor is seeking government approval for large-scale importation.

"We're attempting to expand international sales," says Hale. "It's been within the past year that we've started developing relationships with distributors and trying to market some products internationally."

Hale sees GEN's mission as making industrial scale agriculture sustainable. Small farms beloved by environmentalists will not feed the world affordably. "At the same time, a lot of the agricultural industry is not paying attention to the effects their long term practices are having. We're attempting to bridge the gap."—RW



SAM DEAN

Carroll Hale of Green Earth Naturally: Helping make a cleaner, greener planet.

High Marks for Virginia's Export Program

Business executives interviewed for this story had nothing but praise for the Virginia Economic Development Partnership and its VALET program (Virginia Leaders in Export Trade).

Michael Newman came to Optical Cable Corporation from an exporting job in Indianapolis: "I was very surprised when I came to Roanoke at the level of exporting that is going on here. It's quite mature and quite progressive and that's due to the involvement of the VEDP in guiding companies and assisting companies to export. I travel 50 to 60 percent of the time and I run into representatives of different states and tell them I'm a Virginia company, and inevitably they comment on how fortunate we are to have

an economic development department that is so focused on exports."

Qualifying companies receive advice and even financial assistance. For example, the VEDP subsidized the translation of part of Timber Truss's website into Spanish.

Another beneficiary is Medeco: "We worked very closely with them in expanding into certain markets," says Clyde Roberson. "They're a good organization, something for the state to be really proud of."

Past and current VALET participants also include Carter Machinery, TREAD Corp., John C. Nordt Company, Foot Levelers, Ply Gem, TMEIC Corporation, Virginia Transformer, and PESCO-BEAM. —RW