

Hundreds Heed the Call to Explore the Unfinished Furniture Industry

Columbus' Cozy Atmosphere Appeals to Attendees and Manufacturers Alike

As the first chapter of UFA's three year stay in Columbus wraps up, it's clear to see why Columbus is the ideal host for UFA's National Convention and Trade Show. The city offers convenience for exhibitors, variety of travel options for the majority of attendees, and a diverse downtown community with many dining and shopping establishments. Initial feedback indicates that the show offered a favorable and very close knit-networking environment. Although raw attendance numbers were down from 2004, this allowed retailers to have increased one-on-one time with even the busiest manufacturers. Retailer Fred Moriarty of Creative Woods commented "the smaller turnout made networking and interacting with manufacturers much easier". In addition to facilitating business between retailers and manufacturers, this year's event schedule also provided various opportunities to network both on and off the show floor: "The essential manufacturers were in attendance, and displayed exceptional pieces. Coming to the show allows us to connect with old friends, and networking with other industry professionals is an extremely valuable tool", reported Bob Stark of Starkwood Furniture. Others praised the convenience of Columbus to a majority of UFA members: "With many customers driving into Columbus, there seemed to be a more manageable number of buyers both Sunday and Monday," said Bobbie Korner, sales representative with Kimball & Company. More than 500 attendees and 250 companies from the unfinished industry were represented in Columbus this year. According to an informal survey conducted at the show, in excess of three quarters of the respondents will be attending Columbus in 2006. Additionally, more than ninety percent of those surveyed made similar and better contacts in Columbus compared to previous shows.

Neeli Bendapudi Reveals the Theory Surrounding Consumers and Brands

The Keynote Speaker for Education Day 2005 was Dr. Neeli Bendapudi, who whisked the UFA members back to school for a crash course about consumer behavior and branding. A professor at Ohio State University, Neeli's engaging speaking style involved the audience fully within her seminar entitled "The Living Brand". The presentation emphasized that a brand is much more than a name; it is a living entity. The brand is both functional and emotional, and a customer's experience will always trump the brand's simple advertisement. Employees act as brand ambassadors, and they are the key to executing the brand promise and fulfilling customer expectations. In order to achieve this goal, companies must understand that employees are their internal customers, and just as vital to success as external consumers. In order to satisfy both sets of customers, companies must abide by the Service Profit Chain model, which dictates that building internal customer satisfaction, creating service quality and value, and building external customer satisfaction and loyalty will result in the ultimate goal of profit and growth. The well-attended session culminated in a question and answer session, and Dr. Bendapudi stayed after the end of the seminar to answer additional inquiries.

The remainder of Education Day involved a comprehensive schedule of sessions presented by volunteers from the unfinished furniture industry. Attendees cycled between breakouts covering a variety of topics such as finishing, instruction on reading a profit and loss statement, assistance from an interior decorator, and much more. The Certification Forum was the last activity of the day, and wrapped up this year's educational portion of the Trade Show. Certified retailers, manufacturers, and sales representative members gathered to

discuss the program and the proposed Industry Advertising Campaign. Steve Kammann of Jackson's Unfinished Furniture discussed how Certification would be a member benefit to all UFA members in 2006. He also talked to the group about how the advertising plans slated for '06 would serve as an accent to what certified members are already doing, telling the story of Real Wood Furniture Finished Your Way®.

Attendees had a chance to relax and mingle at the 15th Anniversary Welcome Reception, held in the open foyer area of the Convention Center. Light hors d' oeuvres and refreshing cocktails were served while friends had the opportunity to catch up and share experiences. On Sunday before the exhibit floor opened, the gavel was passed to UFA's new president, Wendy Nusbaum during the 1st Annual Meeting. Speakers of the business meeting also included current President, Jack Campbell. Both Jack and Wendy discussed the current state of the association and moving UFA into the future. The Annual Business Meeting was well attended and plans are already secured for this to be an event held at the Tradeshow each year.

Sailing Across the Show Floor

Nearly 50 exhibitors brought their wares to Columbus for 2005, occupying more than 118,000 square feet of exhibit space. Booth designs were innovative and the pace of business was steady as orders were written throughout the show days. New exhibitors offered a variety of unique products, including website hosting & design services and retail financing. First time exhibiting companies accounted for approximately 20 percent of this year's exhibitors. Luncheon roundtables were set up on the show floor on Sunday and Monday, and attendees gathered to dine and discuss pertinent issues. Popcorn was available to attendees on Sunday afternoon, offering a tasty treat and a break from conducting business. Nearly thirty new products were presented in the Product Showcase, ranging from bookcases to entertainment centers. Another big winner in Columbus was the Christian Children's Home of Ohio, UFA's charity of choice. Thirteen UFA manufacturer companies donated over 200 products with a total value of \$32,000. Arthur W. Brown donated the large ship that comprised their award winning booth along with \$9,000 worth of merchandise. All But Grown-ups, Hardwood Specialties and Rustic Natural Cedar Furniture donated the entire contents of their booth space to the Children's Home.

With the business and networking opportunities Columbus provides in addition to unparalleled convenience, the unfinished furniture industry eagerly looks forward to docking at Columbus through 2007.