

Standing the Test of Time: Aurora Specialty Textiles Group Marks 140 Years of U.S. Manufacturing Excellence

While thousands of US manufacturing companies have closed over the past 40 years, or moved operations overseas, Aurora Specialty Textiles Group (ASTG) has remained in the USA and this year is celebrating 140 years of continuous operation outside Chicago, Illinois

Through two world wars, two global pandemics, a major depression, countless recessions and under the terms of 26 different US presidents, Aurora has been a steadfast Chicago region employer and an anchor manufacturing operation for the US textile industry supply chain.

“Today, Aurora is the leading North American textile finishing company with wide width coating capabilities,” said Marcia Ayala, president of the company. “Aurora’s product offerings have expanded greatly from our beginnings in 1883 supplying private label sheeting to Sears & Roebuck. But our core values of supporting both the US textile industry supply chain and the community where we live and work have remained the same.”

ASTG opened in Aurora, Illinois, on the Fox River as the Aurora Cotton Mills 18 years after the Civil War. Over time Aurora’s products and services grew and so did its reputation for innovation and quality. The company’s name also went through a few evolutions including Aurora Bleachery and Dye Works, Aurora Textiles, Aurora Textile Finishing Company and today, Aurora Specialty Textiles Group.

In 1977 Aurora was purchased by Meridian Industries, a privately owned conglomerate based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In 2015, Aurora moved to an updated facility in Yorkville, Illinois, not far from its original location, to keep up with changing trends and technologies in the US textile industry. With the new plant a mere 10 miles away from the old plant, Aurora was able to retain all employees while adding new personnel and a new generation of high tech finishing and manufacturing equipment.

That investment in state-of-the-art textile technology made it possible for Aurora’s plant in Yorkville to offer a wide array of products and services used in a range of applications including pressure sensitive tapes, industrial belting, digitally printable textiles, military textiles, healthcare & safety, sanding abrasives, and outdoor protective coverings. Aurora offers fabric preparation, fabric coating and finishing, calendaring, fabric dyeing, converting services, contract manufacturing and toll manufacturing.

“We are in the best position we have ever been to create something terrific,” at Aurora, said Bruce Pindyck, Chairman, President, and CEO of Meridian Industries. “We are constantly evolving and that is critical to the company’s success.”

While Aurora’s technologies and products have evolved, the company’s commitment to workforce diversity has remained a core value. Aurora hired women from almost day 1 and today, women make up 23 percent of the company’s workforce and 50% of the company’s leadership, which includes the company’s president.

Also, in step with changing times, Aurora has been a textile industry leader in the area of sustainability, winning awards for the many steps they’ve taken to reduce energy use, water consumption, residual effluent, air pollution and VOC’s.

In addition, Aurora has won numerous awards from the Valley Industrial Association (VIA) for operational excellence and innovation. The VIA serves manufacturing operations throughout the Chicago region’s corner of the Midwest manufacturing belt.

“Our Midwest roots run deep, and so does our commitment to continuous growth, innovation and evolution in step with the changing demands of today’s global textile industry,” said Ayala. “For us, the key to success is continuous improvement while staying rooted in the community where our employees have lived and worked for 140 years. We are all very proud of our history and our continued place as a trusted US textile industry manufacturer.”