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Merger will move Kindel Furniture from Grand Rapids to Wyoming

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Cami Reister | The Grand Rapids Press

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Founded in St. Louis in 1901, Kindel Furniture Co. has called Grand Rapids home since 1912, when it built the factory on Garden Street SE where the brickwork bears its name.

But as a result of a merger announced Tuesday, the manufacturer of high-end, handcrafted tables, armoires and bed sets will move out of the Furniture City -- but not far.

Company representatives announced Tuesday that Kindel is merging with The Taylor Co., a Wyoming manufacturer of high-end, wooden and veneered components that supplies Kindel and other furniture manufacturers.

Kindel's operations will move to the Taylor facility at 4047 Eastern Ave. SE in Wyoming, just over the border. The new company, which also includes Superior Furniture Co. and Taylor Millworks, will operate under the Kindel name.

"Our plan is to begin the physical move in about 10 days, with the slated completion six to eight weeks from now," said John VanZee, president and co-owner of The Taylor Co. who will serve as CEO of the new Kindel Furniture Co.

While the move means furniture made under the Kindel name will benefit from Taylor's updated and automated equipment, the product still will be hand-carved, hand-sanded and hand-finished.

"There's probably very little that will change from location to location in terms of being hand-



Adam Bird | The Grand Rapids Press

John Van Zee, CEO of the Taylor Co., middle, talks to Bob Rinck, right, and Paul Hansen. Van Zee is merging his company with Kindel Furniture to operate jointly under the Kindel name.

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crafted," VanZee said. "This is about using improved technology rather than abandoning the heritage."

The deal will help Kindel remain flexible in the marketplace, said James Fisher, CEO of the old Kindel Furniture Co. and co-owner and board chairman of the merged entity.

"The Taylor Co. is contributing advanced techniques in woodworking and modern business methods that will make Kindel much more 'custom capable,' which is the inescapable trend in fine furniture buying today," Fisher said in a statement.

Interior designer Kreg DeVecht said the move should help Kindel's position in the marketplace.

"I just had a client call me this morning who just got her dining room set delivered," said DeVecht, who works at Israels Designs for Living. "She was absolutely thrilled. She said there was nothing on the market to compare with their quality.

"Knowing that, I'm sure they'll maintain that quality."

This is the third time that VanZee has added operations to his 92,000-square-foot Eastern Avenue facility, which he moved into in 2005 after almost 30 years in Comstock Park. Last spring, The Taylor Co. acquired Superior Furniture Co. in Lowell, and it added Quality Door & Trim in Holland in September.

Looking forward, VanZee said the company will focus on the architectural and design community, with an emphasis on choices, customization and building to order.

"That part of the business is growing rapidly," he said. "And we'd also like to capture more international sales."

Furniture analyst Michael Dunlap said the Kindel name will be a boost to The Taylor Co., its subsidiaries and the Grand Rapids region.

"Grand Rapids benefits by saving one of the last surviving 'legacy' furniture companies that helped found this region's global leadership," he said.

Some job loss is expected as a result of consolidation, but it is too soon to predict how many, VanZee said. Kindel employs 83 full- and part-time people at Garden Street; Taylor employs about 64 full-time people.

"We want to retain as many jobs as we can," VanZee said.

Employees at both facilities were told of the merger Tuesday morning. VanZee said the Garden Street facility remains owned by Fisher and is not part of the merger.

The Fisher family, from Muncie, Ind., was the sole owner of Kindel before the merger.

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