

## BEDDING GIANTS

# FXI aims for the cutting edge at R&I Center

BY DAVID PERRY

ASTON, Pa. — “Innovation,” Diane Adams said, “is a state of mind.”

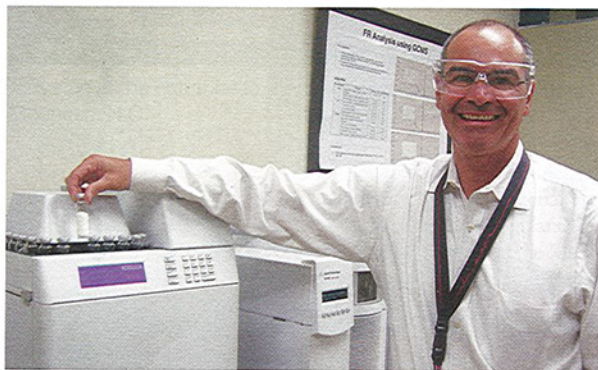
The chief marketing officer for foam maker and bedding producer FXI was leading a tour of FXI’s Research & Innovation Center, located in this Philadelphia suburb. It quickly became clear that innovation is also a state of place — a place like the FXI facility.

The 30,000-square-foot center, open only to invited guests, is working to develop new foam applications for the mattress industry and several other industries served by Media, Pa.-based FXI.

The company, owned by a private equity firm, debt free, and in “a very strong financial position,” understands that innovation will be a key to its future success, Adams said.

So FXI adorned the walls of the R&I facility with quotes, il-

**‘Innovation is a state of mind.’**



Vinnie Bonaddio stands by the Gas Chromatograph in the FXI R&I testing lab.

lustrations and artwork designed to inspire creative thoughts, including this 1899 observation from Charles Duell, the Commissioner of the U.S. Patent Office: “Everything that can be invented has been invented.”

Yes, he was way, way off base.

FXI, in fact, has numerous patents on products it has developed over the years and is currently working on a number of new initiatives, aiming to meet consumer needs in the industries it serves, Adams said.

In the mattress industry, FXI recently developed two new foams to help bedding manufacturers offer a cooler night of sleep to consumers. Its Aerus and Maxperm foams both offer



Jacqui Griffith, Diane Adams, and Gary Fassak, all of FXI, stand in front of a wall of inspirational sayings and quotes designed to inspire creativity and innovation at the FXI Research and Innovation Center.

improved airflow characteristics, thus promoting cooler sleep, the company said.

FXI used consumer research to confirm the consumer need for those foams. Adams said consumer research compiled by FXI found that “consumers want memory foam beds for all of their traditional benefits, but are also looking for added features, particularly with regard to temperature regulation.”

Aerus foam has more than five times more airflow capacity than conventional memory foams on the market, and Maxperm foams feature a cell structure that is completely open, providing 15 times more airflow than other comfort related-foams, FXI said.

The Maxperm foams are developed through a process called “thermal reticulation,” which Adams described on her tour of the R&I facility. She said the cell windows in the foam are “blown out via a controlled detonation.” The cell struts that are left in place are far more breathable than conventional foams, Adams said.

FXI says that Maxperm foams can be used in different layers of the bed to achieve greater consistency of airflow throughout the mattress.

The Research & Innovation Center features a number of different labs where technicians do their work. An “accelerated aging lab” subjects foams to various tests to see how they hold up over time, while a scanning electron microscope in another lab is used to look for impurities in various foams. That high-powered

scope can also illuminate dust mites and bed bugs. FXI is the only foam producer using that particular piece of equipment, it says.

In the “wet labs,” chemists create small-scale foam blocks in their search for new and better foams. Lasers and temperature probes precisely monitor those foams as they take shape, some looking like fast-rising loaves of bread as they rise in carefully

controlled test chambers.

pany. We are using innovation to create better product platforms for our company.”

He said FXI’s customers know they can rely on the company to provide products that are reliable in performance and consistent in quality.

The innovation is consumer-focused, Adams added. “We understand what the consumers needs are,” she said. “We are laser-focused on the needs in the



Harry DePaul conducts a hand mix of a foam formulation in a laboratory at FXI.

marketplace.”

FXI supplies foam to several major bedding producers and other bedding makers. And the company also has a unit that makes finished mattresses and sleep accessories for sale directly to retailers.

What’s next for FXI? The company sees a bright future for gel products, which it says offer support, comfort and temperature control in the bedding arena. “We are taking gel to a whole new level,” Adams said.

Other rooms in the center are stocked with high-tech measuring devices, including a gas chromatography mass spectrometer, which can read the “fingerprint” of every chemical in the foam or product being examined.

“The key differentiator for us is our skill set in foam technology,” observed Gary Fassak, senior vice president of home furnishings. “We have been on the cutting edge of that field. We make that investment as a com-