

# Universal Fibers plans expansion, 84 new jobs

Writer / Bristol Herald Courier  
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BRISTOL, Va. – Lightning – in the form of plant expansions and new hiring – really can strike twice on the same date.

On Wednesday, Universal Fibers officials announced plans for a \$13 million expansion of its manufacturing facility in the Bristol-Washington County Industrial Park.

The expansion is expected to create 84 new jobs during the next two years. And the announcement came exactly four years to the day after company officials announced similar growth in 2005.

“In the four years since the last announcement, we’ve become more of a worldwide company,” Universal CEO Marc Ammen said during a news conference Wednesday. “We’ve expanded and diversified our customer base. And with our new technology, we’re ready to expand our manufacturing platform.”

Ammen also joked about the company’s next expansion.

“You know when, the date it will be, we just have to figure out which year it will be,” Ammen said.

The company produces solution-dyed fibers for the commercial flooring, transportation, industrial fiber and textile markets at plants in Washington County, plus facilities in North Carolina, Thailand and China.

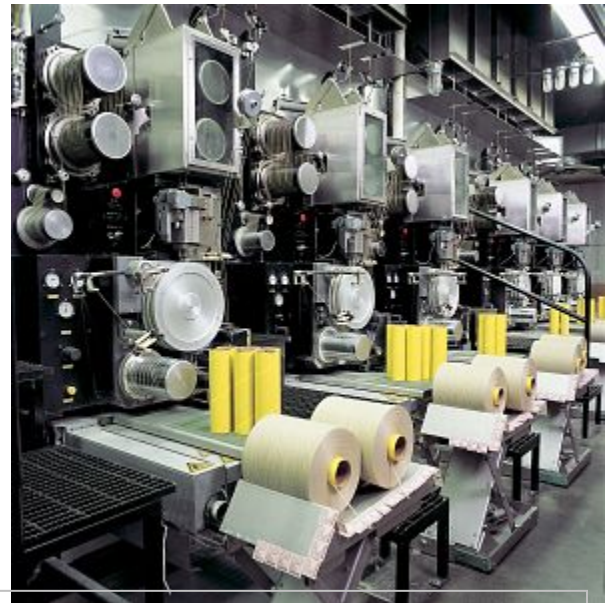
“Washington County, Virginia, is our company headquarters, so it only makes sense for this location to be our first choice for this exciting expansion,” Ammen said.

The expansion is due primarily to the company’s unique ‘EarthSmart’ technology, which takes existing carpet and turns it back into usable nylon fiber for other products, Ammen said.

“We’re excited to hear some positive news and we’re excited about Universal Fibers future plans,” said Kenneth Reynolds, chairman of the county Board of Supervisors.

During Wednesday’s event, the company received ceremonial checks totaling \$600,000 in incentives from a combination of local and state sources.

Universal will receive \$300,000 from the Virginia Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission and a \$150,000 grant from the Virginia Governor’s Opportunity Fund.



Contributed photo  
Universal Fibers produces solution dyed fibers for the commercial flooring, transportation and industrial fiber and textile markets

In addition, the Washington County Board of Supervisors and the county Industrial Development Authority each will contribute \$75,000 in matching funds.

“Anytime a company will invest \$13 million and bring 84 new jobs, its appropriate for the state to help,” state Sen. William Wampler, R-Bristol, said. “Even in these tough budget times, we still have the ability to make these strategic investments.”

Incentive monies will primarily be used to help pay for new manufacturing equipment, create a product center inside the local facility and make some changes to the building’s exterior and entrance, Ammen said.

The company also qualifies for a major business facility job tax credit and the state Department of Business Assistance will provide training assistance for employees.

Machinery for the expansion has been ordered and hiring is under way. All positions will be full time with benefits, but the salary range is still being determined, Ammen said.

Established in 1970, the company currently employs about 380 at the local facility and 175 at two plants in North Carolina.

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