



## INSIDER'S VIEW

Jerry Epperson

### Green Front defines destination store

Sometimes we underestimate the power of home furnishings. Our industry has hundreds of stories of entrepreneurs who started furniture retailers or manufacturers and built multimillion-dollar companies or in the case of the Waneks at Ashley, multibillion-dollar companies.

Most started with more initiative and hard work than money, but they grew and were profitable, allowing prosperous lives and great families. But sometimes, home furnishings can transform an entire community, making it grow and become a destination for consum-

Front's massive presence. Of the 16 buildings, four offer accessories, one is for gifts and 11 show high-end furniture. Mixed among these are boutique dress shops, bakeries, antique stores, restaurants and art galleries, making an entertaining, consumer-welcoming retail mix.

According to Furniture/Today's lovely research department, Green Front in 2012 had sales of about \$39 million, but that includes two smaller stores in Manassas, Va., and Raleigh, N.C. Doing \$30 million in home furnishings sales in a community of less than 10,000 with a large student population

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ers hundreds of miles away. I bet you are thinking of Nebraska Furniture Mart or Jordon's in Boston, but no, I am speaking about Green Front Furniture in Farmville, Va.

Farmville is about 75 miles south-southwest of Richmond. It is the home of Longwood University, once a women's college for teachers, but now a multifaceted university with almost 5,000 students, with preppy Hampden-Sydney College about five miles away. These two schools were why people knew about Farmville when I was young. Today, this community is best known in the surrounding states as a destination to buy fine home furnishings.

Former tobacco warehouses, a shoe factory, department store and other retail storefronts along Farmville's Main Street near the Appomattox River now make up the 850,000 square feet of Green

Front.

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In my opinion, Dick Cralle and his friend John Wingo have saved Farmville from being yet another small Southern town with a downtown of tattoo parlors, thrift stores, pawn shops, and lots of multi-story closed factories with a Wal-Mart just outside of town. Green Front is not a furniture store, it is a shopping experience.

By the way, if you fly into the Farmville Airport, Green Front will come pick you up. Remember that the next time you fly into Farmville.

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