



The Inns & Spa at Mill Falls is taking ABC News up on its "Made in the U.S.A." challenge in its \$5 million expansion project.

SUNDAY NEWS FILE PHOTO

MADE IN THE USA



An American flag stamped on a pine 2-by-4 shows that the wood framing used at two new buildings at Church Landing is American-made.
BRENDA CHARPENTIER

Inns at Mill Falls expansion gears up for 95% homegrown

By BRENDA CHARPENTIER
Sunday News Correspondent

MEREDITH — Taking up a national challenge thrown down by ABC News to buy American-made products has already proved good for business for a high-end inn overlooking Lake Winnepesaukee.

The Inns & Spa at Mill Falls is midway through a \$5 million expansion project to add two new buildings, totaling 17,000 square feet of vacation rental space. Soon after breaking ground last fall, in response to a World News Tonight broadcast that challenged America to buy American and tell Diane Sawyer about it, the Inns committed to using American-made building materials wherever possible.

So far, the new buildings are 95 percent American made, according to Mills Falls and Conneston Construction Inc., the Gilford company in charge of construction.

The vacation suites won't be open until June, but the Buy American commitment is already helping marketing efforts.

"We've gotten great feedback locally, and on Facebook. People are saying, 'What a great thing. I want to come stay with you, knowing you care about American jobs,'" said Michelle Brown, marketing director.

Ross Currier, vice president of Conneston Construction, said Rusty McLearn, president of Mills Falls, had seen the weeklong series on ABC, which was based on the premise that if more people sought out American-made products, more American manufacturing jobs would result. Government construction projects

have rules about buying American-made projects, but private builders are under no such obligation.

"That's when the seed got planted," Currier said.

He said he got virtually zero resistance from the 16 subcontractors tasked with checking to see where their supplies originated and seeking American sources.

"Given the way the economy is right now, and everyone is concerned with helping out our fellow man, everyone was like yeah, if this is going to help out the overall economy and keep jobs in the U.S., then yes, we're all for it," he said.

Once everyone was committed, they were in for some surprises.

"The amazing thing was that most of the guys came back and said pretty much everything I've got is already made in America," Currier said.

When an American-made product needed to be found to replace a foreign-made one, it was generally feasible, economically, to choose the American product, Currier said.

All told, choosing American over foreign cost an additional \$4,000, the company said. The additional cost came primarily for smaller items like hinges and locksets for doors, and fasteners such as screws and nails, Currier said.

If they had insisted on 100 percent American, however, the costs would have mounted, Currier said.

Three areas proved too expensive or problematic to choose American over foreign. A limited-use elevator made in America would have cost twice the price of the Canadian-made elevator that was purchased. The Canadian elevator also fit the



Ross Currier, vice president of Conneston Construction, inspects the label on a window to verify that it was made in America, on the job site at the Inns & Spa at Mill Falls in Meredith.

BRENDA CHARPENTIER

project's needs better than the closest American counterpart that could be found.

Also, American-made electrical supplies were deemed too costly, and the Douglas fir interior paneling came from British Columbia, where the trees grow. Sticking with the Douglas fir was an aesthetic decision; the owners wanted a look similar to that in the Inns' existing buildings.

Currier said purchases of non-American-made goods totaled about \$150,000, which he said is a small part of his company's overall \$3.2 million contract for the job.

Mike Girard of LDG Corp. in Pembroke is the subcontractor for the project's plumbing and heating systems. He said making sure his

products were American made was a simple matter of taking the time to check with his suppliers.

"It was not a big challenge," he said. "It was just a matter of going through everything and making sure it was, to the best of your knowledge, made in America."

It was eye-opening for him to discover that basic fasteners like screws were a little more challenging to find from an American source than larger items. He welcomed the request to supply American-made products.

"It's a first," he said. "We couldn't wait to get involved. The more products we can keep (being made) here, the more American people we can

► See Inns, Page B12

Inns

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Signage at the entrance to the construction site at Church Landing in Meredith tells visitors about the effort to buy American at the expansion project for the Inns & Spa at Mill Falls, which has accepted a national challenge issued by ABC News to buy American.

BRENDA CHARPENTIER

keep working," he said.

For other subcontractors, the American-made stipulation is quite common, because government contracts require it. S.L. Chasse Welding and Fabricating in Hudson is used to asking for "mill searches," which trace orders back to their point of origin, according to Ken Worrell, the company's vice president.

"We ask suppliers to mill search and make a judgment based on that," he said.

For the Mill Falls project, the mill search revealed that the steel was manufactured in Arizona, Georgia, Illinois and Virginia, he said.

Brown said the strategic communications company Mill Falls uses has sent ABC News information about its efforts, along with some footage from a local television report on the project in the hopes that ABC will feature the project in a follow-up piece.

She said Mill Falls is promoting its success in reaching "95 Percent Made in America" in the hope that other companies will take up the challenge as well.

"The take-away is: Put a little more effort into it, and we can keep Americans working," she said.



The Tyvek insulation on the outside of the new Church Landing buildings is made by Dupont, an American company. The two new structures are scheduled to be completed by May at the Inns & Spa at Mill Falls.

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