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A Foreign Trade Zone debuts — here

Sterling-based firm touts 90,000-square-foot Stonewall Industrial Park site

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The Winchester Star

Winchester — An unassuming blue warehouse located in Stonewall Industrial Park may not look like the only Foreign Trade Zone in the United States Customers and Border Protection Service's Dulles-region's customs district.

But it is.

The Foreign Trade Zone applies only to the business within the 90,000-square-foot warehouse, Sterling-based Fortessa Inc., which activated the zone with a brief ribbon-cutting ceremony on Friday.

Fortessa Inc. designs, develops, and markets high-end tableware such as china plates, glassware — it carries Schott Zwiesel crystal — and flatware. It imports products from 60 manufacturers in 12 countries, and a great number of those items will now end up in the Winchester-area warehouse.

The Foreign Trade Zone designation allows those products to be brought into the country and then shipped out again without the payment of customs duties, according to the company's co-founder and one of its managing directors, Scott M. Hamberger. In other countries, such zones are known as free-trade zones, according to information provided by Fortessa.

Basically, the local warehouse will be a central collection point for reshipment, he said.

Customs duties must be paid on Fortessa's imported products sold in the United States, he added.

While the majority of the 14-year-old company's wares are sold domestically — Fortessa (which began in 1993 as Great American Trading Company Inc.) focuses on both the hospitality industry and retail sales — it is also seeing 30 percent yearly growth in its exports, Hamberger said.

In his comments to a small crowd gathered Friday at the company's 402 McGhee Road warehouse, he said, "product will flow through this facility to our customers in the United States, Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean Basin, Central America, South America, and even to Europe and the Middle East."

The trade zone is cost-effective when it comes to those exports, because no duties have to be paid on the items, he said.

As part of his presentation, Hamberger presented a plaque of thanks to Charles R. Daniels, the company's director of logistics, for his efforts in getting the zone established for the company.



ABOVE: Scott Hamberger, managing director of Fortessa, on Friday welcomed guests to the grand opening of the firm's warehouse and Foreign Trade Zone north of Winchester.
BELOW: A look at some of Fortessa's products.
(Photos by Scott Mason)



Daniels said the Winchester location is a fantastic one for trade, being situated so close to the Virginia Inland Port in Front Royal, and Interstates 81 and 66. "From here, you can go just about anywhere."

Having someone like Daniels dedicated to getting a trade zone designation could be a valuable move for companies involved in international business, said Warren Hammer, business development project manager for the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, who was on hand for the ceremony.

He said in the past, he has even advised companies to hire an employee to work only on having a zone established, because the future benefits will be greater than that initial expense.



Visitors toured the Fortessa warehouse during its Friday grand unveiling. Warren Hammer, business development project manager for the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, offered praise for the creation of a Foreign Trade Zone in the Winchester area, saying it holds potential for job growth in Virginia and the United States as well.

A dedicated staff person is often necessary, because the process can be time-consuming and tedious, Hammer said.

"It's a huge step," he added. It also adds potential for growth in Virginia and the United States without adding any cost to a company, Hammer said.

Fortessa's presence will bring some additional jobs to the area. Hamberger said the family-owned company has added about 30 new positions in



The stemware sold by Fortessa includes Schott Zwiesel crystal.

Northern Virginia since 2003, with 10 of those in the Winchester area. He anticipates 10 more positions will also appear here in the next 12 months.

"This FTZ is part of the next tier of growth for our company," he said.

As such, it also displays Fortessa's belief in Virginia as a future hub of world trade.

Hamberger said when products are shipped to the Fortessa facility in the Stonewall Industrial Park, they often first come through the Port of Norfolk and then the Virginia Inland Port. When they head back out, they could go to the Inland Port again, or end up on trucks, he added.

While the Winchester-area warehouse is a big one for the company, it also has facilities in Las Vegas and Toronto, a partner in Mexico, and its headquarters in Sterling, Daniels said. The Las Vegas and Sterling facilities also include showrooms, according to company literature.

For Patrick Barker, executive director of the Winchester-Frederick County Economic Development Commission, Fortessa's presence in the area provides further recognition of the area's role as a transportation portal for not only the Northern Virginia-Washington D.C. market, but also the global marketplace.

Additionally, it's an example of the area's ever-diversifying economy, he said.

And it shows what can occur when people in the public and private sectors — on the local, state, and national levels — work together, said Charles H. Weiss, president and CEO of the Top of Virginia Regional Chamber.

Foreign Trade Zones are also important, because they lower the cost of doing business, allowing the companies that use them to be more competitive in the global market, he said.

They add to tax bases and provide job opportunities, which along with other benefits, makes the presence of such a zone in the Winchester area very exciting, he added.



Scott Hamberger, co-founder of Fortessa Inc., said Friday the company's presence in the area will bring additional jobs.

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