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McCain and Stephanopoulos on Old Hickory Chairs

Sunday, August 23rd 2009

Sunday morning on ABC News, George Stephanopoulos interviewed Senator John McCain overlooking the Grand Canyon on chairs made by Old Hickory Furniture in Shelbyville, Indiana.

Old Hickory Furniture Company is an American success story; a small company founded in the late 1800s in a workshop in Martinsville, Indiana making chairs, rockers and settees from young hickory trees and selling them at the town square on Saturdays. Soon people with money and influence "discovered" hickory furniture to be stylish, comfortable and durable, so investors and entrepreneurs got involved. The company quickly grew to more than 150 employees in the early 1900s and produced more than 2000 pieces of furniture a week. Never before had people realized that something as rustic and natural as a young hickory tree could be crafted into such comfortable and long-lasting furniture. Old Hickory furniture became popular in all the newly built National Park Lodges and in the glamorous Adirondack Great Camps. By the 1920s most large resorts featured Old Hickory in and around their facilities. During the early years, numerous competing firms spouted up throughout Indiana, mostly by former employees. Despite the competition, the World Wars, and the Great Depression, Old Hickory continued to thrive through the 1940s. The 1950s-1970s were difficult for Old Hickory as consumers became more and more interested in "modern" furnishings that were made of metal or plastic. Old Hickory furniture was no longer popular, so the company struggled for several years trying to find the right balance of products and styles. In 1978, Old Hickory was forced to shut the doors of the factory in Martinsville. However, a few short years later a cabinetmaker from nearby Shelbyville, Indiana purchased the Old Hickory assets and re-opened production. This event helped spark a renaissance for Old Hickory furniture. Soon antique Old Hickory items were selling for thousands of dollars at auctions and estate sales. Lodges and restaurants were again asking for the classic hickory furniture for their new buildings and their re-models. In addition to the commercial customers, Old Hickory formed a large retail base for consumers to purchase Old Hickory for their homes and cabins. Today Old Hickory is seen as a part of Americana in this ever changing global economy. When visiting the factory one is likely to see things are not much different that they were 100 years ago. Most products are still made by hand including the intricate weaving of chair seats and backs. Another positive is that hickory furniture is friendly to the environment because the hickory saplings are naturally renewable and are considered a hindrance to the growth of the larger timbers of the forest. So harvesting the hickory for our furniture actually helps the larger timbers grow stronger. Old Hickory continues its "Tradition of Excellence" today with a full range of products as seen on our website (www.oldsickory.com) or in retail stores around the country.