

**BUSINESS NEWS**

## Miskelly celebrates new store, first outside Jackson, Miss.



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**HATTIESBURG, Miss.** — Miskelly Furniture drew more than 300 industry friends, area officials and employees to a gala here March 1, celebrating the opening of its first store outside of its Jackson, Miss., home.



And stellar early results in an otherwise challenging business climate have the Top 100 company eyeing even more new-market growth down the road.

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The 70,000-square-foot showroom, located in Westover Crossing shopping center in a former Gander Mountain space, had been blowing past sales projections since its Feb. 9 soft opening, but things got even better on the Saturday, March 3, grand opening.

Sales that day were about 250% ahead of the retailer's goals, said Oscar Miskelly, partner in the family-owned business. Throughout the day, the main parking lot and overflow lot were full.



Miskelly helped things along by employing a popular promotion that has led to big Memorial Day and Labor Day weekend sales days in Jackson — an eight-hour giveaway of more than \$15,000 in cash and other prizes to registered consumers who had to be present to win. This one culminated in a 6 p.m. drawing for a \$5,000 shopping spree.

But Miskelly said it's more than this that gave the Hattiesburg store — a more than \$1 million project — such a strong start. The retailer's second largest store features displays of primarily best-sellers at its Jackson flagship about 90 miles to the northwest along with a new take and placement for its bedding department.



Nearly all of goods on display are in stock, and Miskelly entered the market promising two-day delivery, "which is really blowing away people because they're used to up to two weeks," Oscar Miskelly said.

In addition, Miskelly said the company carefully researched its lighting options and ended up repitting the former Gander Mountain fluorescent fixtures with LEDs and then added LED track lighting to supplement. The new lighting combined with the store's polished concrete floors have helped the furniture displays pop in a way that has Miskelly considering changes at its flagship location, even though that store went through its own remodeling just a few years ago.



“All the furniture vendors here were saying it’s really one of the best displays they’ve seen,” he said.

With a push to fast-track the store opening to early this year, the retailer decided not to contract out the design work, a move that would have slowed the project down, noted Alan VonderHaar, Miskelly’s director of strategic development and mattress specialist known to consumers as Dr. V.

“It’s the first showroom actually designed by the buyers and our visual managers. That was fairly unique for us,” he said. “We all got in a room to (discuss) where we wanted to put what.”

That led to a new take on the mattress gallery, a 4,300-square-foot space situated to the left just off the front entrance. There are 47 mattresses in the department — Tempur-Pedic, Sealy, Stearns & Foster and Restonic brands — nearly all shown in king. Miskelly is calling the area its Bedgear Performance Sleep Store with the entrance dominated by a large wall of Bedgear performance pillows, sheets and protectors, as well as an air machine that demonstrates the cooling airflow properties and technology behind the products.



In addition, in a clearance/value area at the back of the store the retailer carved out space for 27 additional mattresses — displaying queen sets from \$199 to \$799 from Corsicana, Sealy and Restonic — giving the retailer a total of 74 mattresses in nearly 7,000 square feet of dedicated space, one of the largest bedding offerings in a single store in the state of Mississippi, VonderHaar contended.

"It literally gives us a range of price points from \$199 to about \$5,000" to touch a very broad consumer base, he said.

Other key suppliers to the new store include Ashley, Bernhardt, Flexsteel, Home-Stretch, Franklin, Fusion, Jonathan Louis and IFD, the latter a resource for updated rustic case goods from Mexico that Miskelly said have become an important look for the retailer.

The gala before the official grand opening included special guests such as former football star and Mississippi native Marcus Dupree, who was featured in an ESPN film profiling his rise to greatness and then fall with an early-career knee injury. Dupree, who helps with area children's charities, signed autographs and DVDs of the film that he handed out to attendees.

Also attending the gala and the ribbon cutting the following day were Howard and Ann Miskelly, now in their early 90s and on location to cheer on the owner sons Chip, Oscar and Tommy Miskelly.

When Miskelly first announced plans for the store in October, Oscar Miskelly said he expected the location would add "north of \$10 million" to Miskelly's top line and hopefully grow to \$15 million in annual sales eventually.

Asked for an update given the store's better-than-expected start, he laughed and said "well north of \$10 million."



The Hattiesburg market, he said, "just mirrors what our culture and core values are all about — faith, family and community — and that's why it's going to be such a great fit for us."

He added the fast start here has lit a fire under the now-seven-store company, which has experienced an otherwise challenging business climate so far this year and saw 2017 sales dip slightly from the \$55.6 million posted in 2016.

"We didn't quite reach our goals (last year), which really reinforced the need to expand, to get outside the market and grow," Miskelly said.

"It's really encouraged us to look at other opportunities out there," he added. "Over the next couple of years, we hope to have an announcement about another (new market)

expansion," but he said it was too early in the process to name the areas Miskelly will evaluate.

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