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Faucet Makers in Taiwan Make History by Setting Up Trade Association

Faucet Makers in Taiwan Make History by Setting Up Trade Association

By STEVE CHUANG

Over the past half century, over 80% of Taiwan-based faucet and sanitary ware makers have been clustered in Lugang Town, in central county of Changhua, making the small community likely ground zero in the sector.

The “cluster effect” typically refers to buyers and sellers in a certain industry congregating in a certain place, like Hollywood for the American filmmaking industry, and hence inducing other buyers and sellers to relocate there as well. But in Lugang Town and its sanitary ware makers in Taiwan, the cluster effect likely relates to the grouping of various makers along the supply chain, not buyers of complete products, who are mostly from abroad.

To further tap the synergy existing in the clustering of the makers in Lugang Town, optimizing their expertise to wield bigger global influence over products ranging from mid-to-high ends, backed by the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the government-funded Industrial Technology Research Institute (ITRI), Changhua County Governor P.Y. Cho, and a group of local suppliers, Lukang Town Chief H.M. Wang thought it was time to write a new page in its industrial history: so on September 27, 2008 the first of its kind in Taiwan the Changhua Water Ware Industry Development Association (CWWIDA) was set up.

More than 150 upstream and downstream firms in Changhua are members of the Association, with Wu Feng Enterprise’s general manger C.C. Chen being the chairman. With Wu Feng being one of the most experienced OEMs (original equipment manufacturer) of brassware in the county, Chen



and his 37-year experience are expected to help build global presence for the trade group.

Birthplace

Without specifically attributing a cause, Chen says that Taiwan’s faucet and sanitary ware sector originated in Dingfanpo, Lugang, a key seaport for immigrants in the nation’s early days, where the sector has become the most prominent after some 50 years of development in the community, where an integrated supply chain has formed with over 1,000 makers, including surface finishers, material suppliers, processors, and specialized machinery makers.

“Changhua boasts the highest distribution of faucet and sanitary ware makers globally, exceeding that in Italy and Japan, where similar

clusters also exist," Chen states. "Taiwan exports NT\$60 billion (about US\$1.875 billion at US\$1:NT\$32) of faucets and related products annually, of which some 80% are from Changhua." So the figures fully speak for the county's importance in the sector.

Realizing the weighty role of the sector for Taiwan, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and government-funded ITRI, have, since 2007, been working on a 3-year project to assist local makers to upgrade technologies to sharpen global competitiveness. This has helped world-caliber companies as Wu Feng, Chuan Wei Metal, Chang Yi Shin, Sheng Tai Brassware, Torng Jng Guan and Sanitary Equipment. In only a year, the project encouragingly has realized technical breakthroughs in surface treatment, mold development and IR (infrared) faucets and related applications, attracting more to come aboard.

Chen strongly believes that a formal trade association representing the traditional industry would garner more official respect and attention, especially when the current global downturn has taken the thunder out of erstwhile high-flying cash-cows as the semiconductor and other electronic sectors.

Objectives

The CWWIDA, among other objectives, will serve as a platform for its members to share up-to-date market information and know-how, which will help them hone competitiveness as they participate in global trade fairs, Chen says.

The Association has been working with the Mechanical and Systems Research Laboratories of ITRI to automate gravity casting, widely adopted in Europe, to try to introduce such methodology to Taiwan. Justifying the merits of gravity casting, which is still prevalent in Taiwan, Chen says that the technique better assures quality, relative to sand casting, by minimizing surface porosity, improving dimensional precision and production efficiency.

Another incentive, Chen adds, to automate casting factories is the "gentrification" of the work

environment. Simply put, "not many fresh college grads are attracted to manual laboring with sand and dirt in a traditional factory." Automated gravity-casting lines means a cleaner, easier work environment that can lure younger staffers, which is absolutely positive for the whole industry.

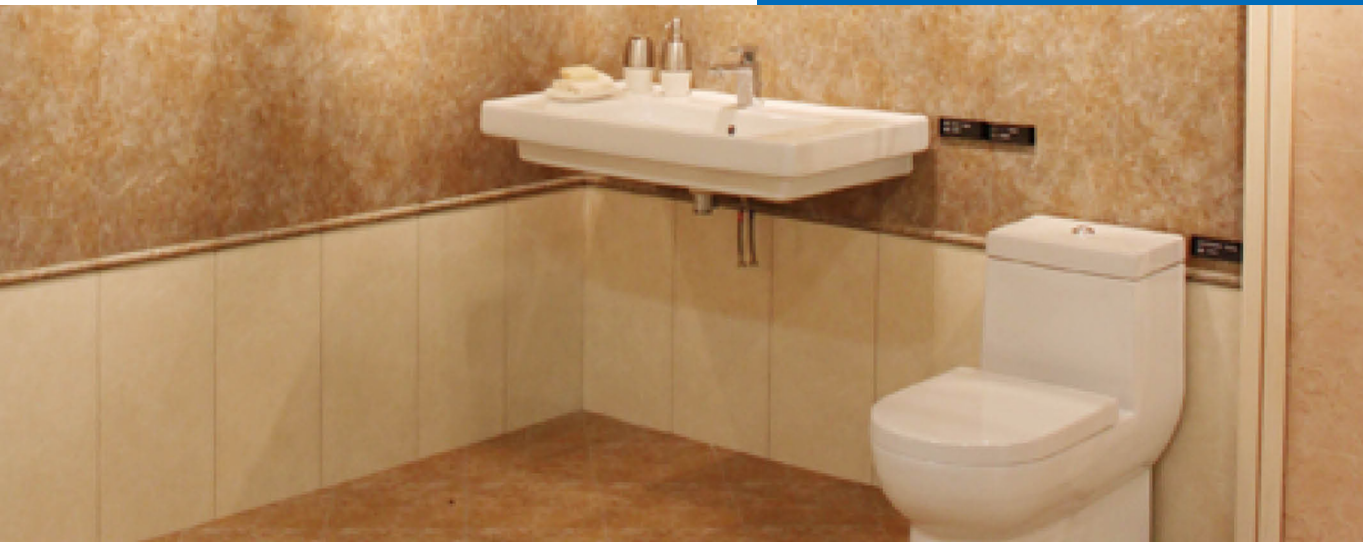
Also, the Association is helping members to meet international standards. Citing the American NSF (National Sanitation Foundation) Standard as example, Chen says that the member factories will be taught to apply lead-free materials to produce NSF-certified faucets and related products to be sold stateside.

Co-branding

Having survived independently in the global market for a few decades, but increasingly challenged recently by emerging rivals, Taiwan-based faucet and sanitary ware makers are relieved to be served not only by the newly-formed trade association, but also perhaps its grandest goals: to help local suppliers build global presence by polishing to a higher gloss their promotions at international trade fairs.

One approach being mapped out to achieve the above, with Chen discussing with the Taiwan External Trade Development Council (TAITRA) and ITRI, is the possibility of co-branding "Water Ware" as the collective face of Taiwan-made faucets and related products at global shows starting 2009. Chen says that such co-branding would help local makers, who are more prudish producers than global promoters, to impress foreign buyers and go upmarket more effectively.

To weather tougher global competition due partly to dumping and partly to the global financial fallout, Chen says: "local suppliers have to enhance global presence by participating in international trade fairs, and, above all, tap teamwork instead of individualism." CENS



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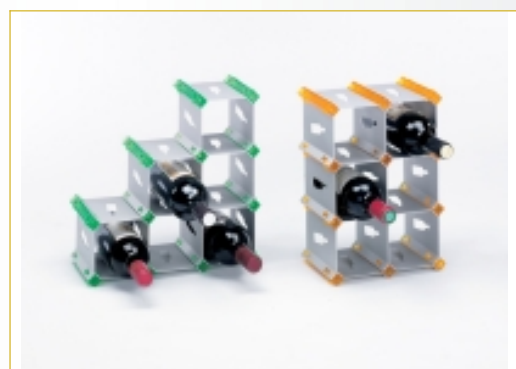
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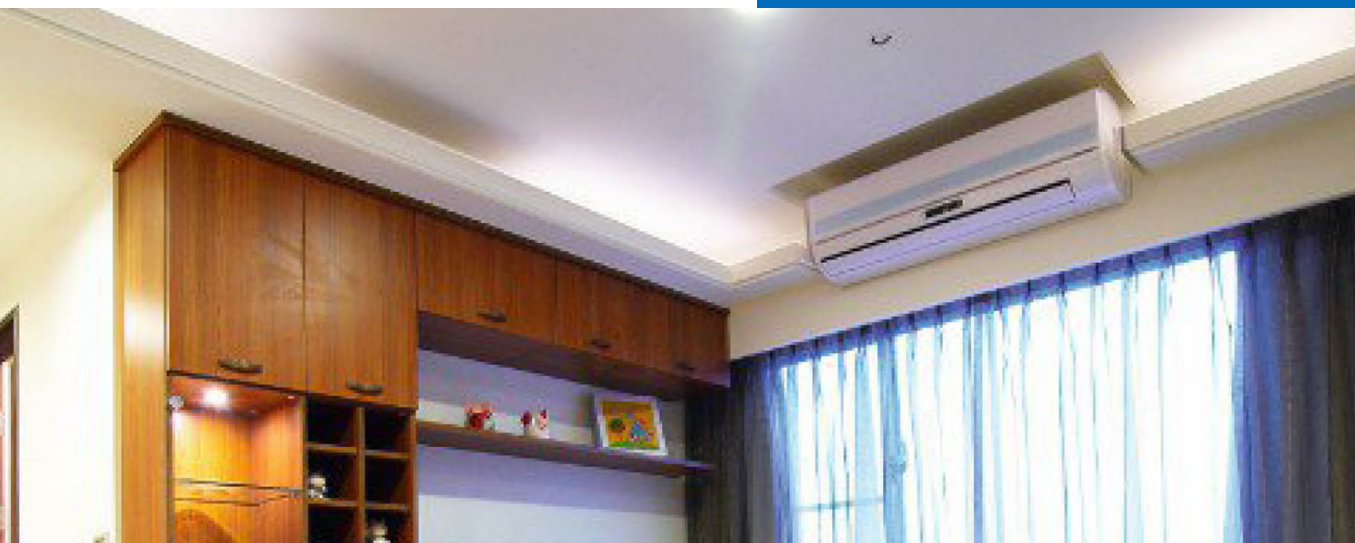
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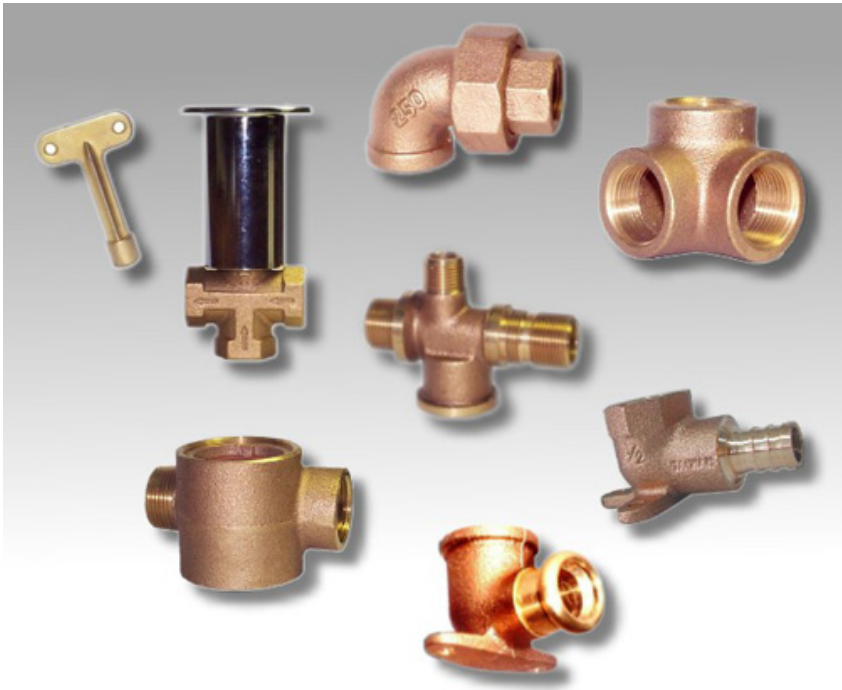
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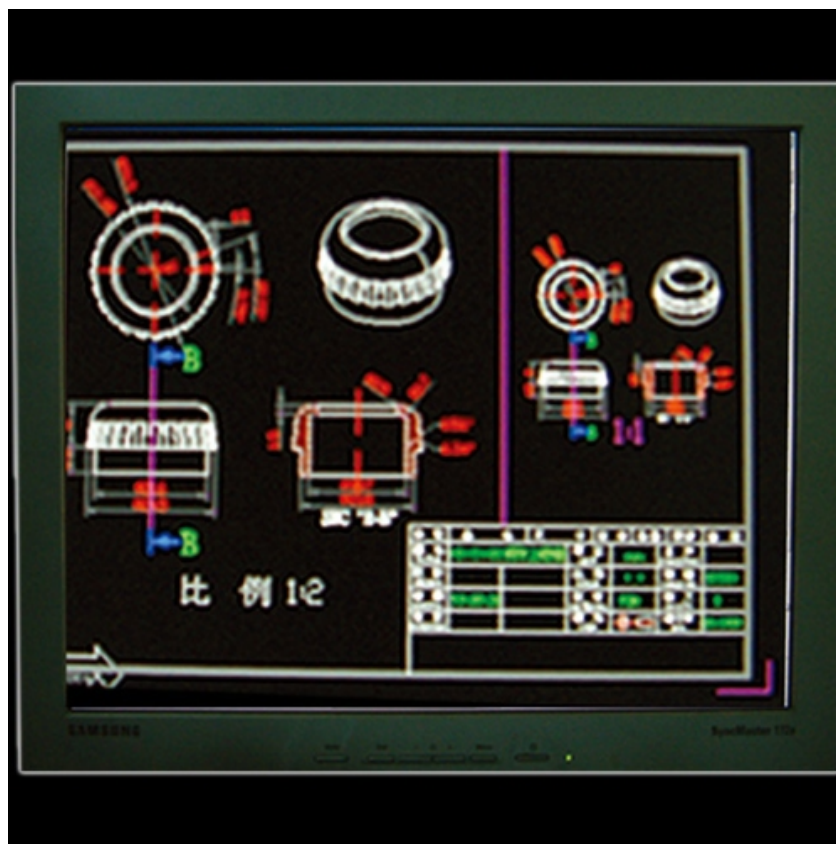
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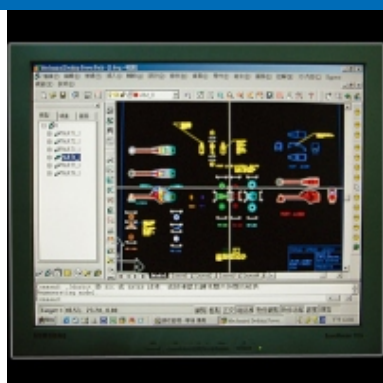


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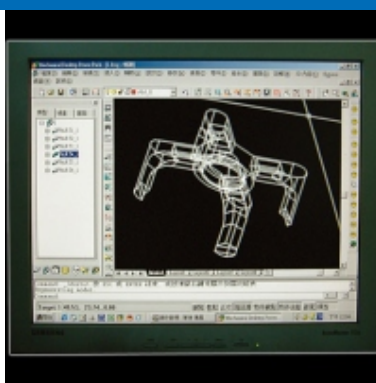
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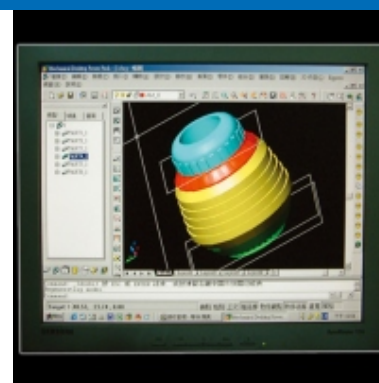
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