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Empire Purchases Ownership in Stove Builder International Inc.

BELLEVILLE, IL – The Empire Group, the parent company of Empire Comfort Systems in Belleville, Illinois, has purchased majority ownership of Stove Builder International (SBI), a Canadian manufacturer of wood-fired and pellet-fired heaters and hearth products, along with venting. Empire manufactures gas-fired heaters, hearth products, and grills.

Both Empire and SBI are family owned manufacturers and both have undertaken aggressive product development programs that have spurred growth in recent years. While SBI's primary market is Canada, they also distribute into the US, South America, Europe, and Australia. Their brands include Osburn, Caddy, Enerzone, Valcourt, Drolet, Century Heating, Nexvent and Vortex. Empire's brands include American Hearth, White Mountain Hearth, Broilmaster Premium Grills, and Empire Heating Systems.

Empire president Nick Bauer says bringing the two companies together makes sense, from a business and a personal level. "I have had two passions in my life; the first is family business, and not just my family business but doing business with other family business. Roughly 97% of Empire's sales are to other privately held family businesses," Bauer said.

"My second passion is local manufacturing. This value was instilled in me by my great-grandfather, who immigrated to America from Germany and founded Empire in 1932. Our



commitment to local manufacturing continued for the next two generations when a lot of product was going overseas.”

During negotiations with SBI, Bauer found kindred spirits in brothers Marc-Antoine and Jean Francois Cantin – the Canadian company’s president and vice president, respectively. “It was not on the radar screen for us to sell a majority stake in our company,” said Marc-Antoine. “We have always been a market consolidator, having bought no less than eight companies over the last 15 years. But when I met Nick and realized what the two organizations could accomplish together, it did not take me too long to convince my brother. This deal will take SBI to the next level and everybody will win, starting with our employees and our customers. Such great fit is not that common. We knew we had to make a move.”

The folks at Empire share that enthusiasm. “The Bauer family is ecstatic to find partners like Marc-Antoine and Jean Francois who share these same core values,” Bauer said. “Only now I guess we need to say ‘North American-based’ manufacturing.”

While the synergy of these venerable manufacturers working together can open up new markets and new opportunities for both, the two companies will continue to operate independently – with no immediate effect on employees from either company.

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