

# Aurora Shoe Co. ready to step up sales by expanding in the US market

by Charley Hannagan / The Post-Standard

Sunday June 07, 2009, 5:00 AM



Stephen D. Cannerelli / The Post-Standard DAVID BINNS, owner of Aurora Shoe Co., stands in the middle of the production room at the factory along state Route 90 south of the village of Aurora in Cayuga County. Binns says he hopes to hire more employees and to double sales over the next two years as he expands into the U.S. market.

Aurora, NY -- A decade ago, if you wanted a pair of Aurora Shoe Co. shoes, you went to the pole barn factory on Route 90 south of this Cayuga County village.

While a resident cat looked on, you climbed a platform just inside a garage door, sat in an old church pew or lawn chair and were fitted for a pair.

The quirky business model worked well for the owners and employees. The shoes -- based on styles dating back to the Middle Ages -- became popular here and overseas. Actors Jodie Foster and Liam Neeson owned Aurora shoes.

"Over time, the demand for the overseas business continued to grow," said David Binns, the shoe company's new owner.

The company continued to make a profit even as it started dropping domestic accounts to satisfy the overseas demand, he said. "It came to a point where the overseas wholesale business was 100 percent of what they were making here," Binns said.

For the past three years, all of the factory's shoes went overseas. So if you wanted a pair of the shoes -- well, you had to go to Japan.

Binns, 26, grew up nearby in King Ferry. He bought his first pair of Aurora shoes when he was 13 and bought the business in January from M.J. Dann, one of its founders. Binns' top priority is to bring Aurora's shoes back to U.S. retailers.

Binns is a mechanical engineer with a degree from Clarkson University in Potsdam. After college, he worked at a Georgia Pacific plant in Plattsburgh, managing 75 people.

The privately owned shoe factory is an about-face from Georgia Pacific, where he sometimes was on call around the clock, said Binns, who lives with his wife, Andrea, in King Ferry. The couple are expecting a baby in July.



Stephen D. Cannerelli / The Post-Standard Phyllis Cooper, of Aurora, works for the Aurora Shoe Co. on State Route 90 south of Aurora. One of her jobs is beveling the front and back of a shoe.

Aurora Shoe employs eight people who have a combined experience of 85 years in shoemaking. Together, they make 50 pairs of shoes a day from raw materials that come from the United States -- supple leather from Chicago and sturdy soles from Massachusetts. The machines they use are 50 or more years old.

"It still is a relatively laid-back atmosphere. We have three cats and two dogs that are here on a regular basis," Binns said.

He's just learning the shoemaking business. "I think there is some room for technology improvements. The work here is really handwork and that's important. The high-quality product we put out requires a human touch," he said.

One of the first technologies introduced when he took over was the computer that sits on an old wooden desk in one corner of the insulated pole barn factory. He also added a fax machine. Prior to that, Aurora Shoe was a paper-only business, Binns said.

"I want to double sales over the next two years. Some of that will be through hiring more people and some of it will be through streamlining processes and improving efficiency," he said.

But the relaxed company culture will remain, Binns said.

The company will grow as it re-enters the domestic market, he said.

"It's encouraging when customers come in and ask if they can still buy shoes. People are interested now, and they've come to find over the past few years they weren't able to get their shoes here because M.J. was strictly trying to satisfy the overseas customer," Binns said.

"The demand is still here. It's just a matter of making enough shoes to reach the markets here," Binns said. "It was a relatively easy to deal with one customer. That's part of why it became the way it was."

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These are the most comfortable shoes that I have ever owned. I am so excited to hear that they are available again!

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it's nice to know something is still made domestically.


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Posted by dlrturtle on [06/07/09 at 1:15PM](#)

I've had a pair of these shoes for 15 years and they are without question, the most comfortable and durable shoes I've ever owned. In fact, watching this piece made me want another pair! Thanks for promoting this great local business.

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Posted by trblmkr on [06/07/09 at 8:51PM](#)

I am so excited! I bought a pair of Aurora Shoes while at Wells College. They were the best shoes ever! They are still the only shoes that have ever seen me through double shifts comfortably. After owning them for about 10 years, my new puppy ate them! I was so pi\$\$ed! I'm thinking that playing hookie for a day to go to the Aurora Shoe Co. to buy a new pair is totally worth it!