

Bedding mood upbeat

Retailers look to keep momentum going

By David Perry

AT THE MARKET — Mattress retailers are sampling a broad array of sleep sets here, hoping to keep their sales moving north in the months to come.

Bedding's budding comeback is showing signs of strength, based on positive developments here, producers reported. They said retail attitudes are good.

"The moods are very upbeat," said Kathy Grigg, vice president of Carolina Mattress Guild.

Some mattress producers see Bedding, p54



Herman Tam of Leggett & Platt shows a demo unit for the company's new fitted sheet system.

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said traffic started light but has picked up as the market has progressed. They said they are seeing some high-quality buyers.

Producers, meanwhile, are contemplating some unwelcome news: Price hikes for key raw materials are coming, and the producers here say they aren't sure how they are going to respond to that situation. They do know that they don't want to put the brakes on a comeback that appears to be gaining momentum.

Gold Bond said it continues to stand out from the pack by emphasizing traditional bedding craftsmanship in its two-sided beds. "Retailers are looking for something to differentiate themselves," said Bob Naboichek, president.

Rick Snider, national sales manager at Glideaway Sleep Products, said retailers are "cautiously optimistic. They believe we may have weathered the worst of the storm. They are more likely to buy now."

Mike Zippelli, CEO of Classic Brands, agreed that the bedding rebound has staying power. Classic is seeking to fuel that rebound with re merchandised lines of memory foam and latex beds under



its Dormia banner.

The green story at Eco-Sleep is resonating with consumers, said Mike Schweiger, vice president. "Retailers are looking for simple, clean, validated stories," he said. "We have that."

Natura has re merchandised its latex line under the Natura Latex banner, offering a more concise assortment at prices from \$1,199 to \$3,499.

"Latex keeps on increasing in popularity," said Ralph Rossdeutscher, president of Natura. "But there is still

room for more growth based on lack of consumer knowledge about the products. The feels on latex beds are great. There is every good reason for consumers to buy latex beds."

Janet Stein of Hastens relaxes on new frame bed introduced by the Swedish bedding maker.

Natura also continues to get "a very, very good reaction" to its NexGel line of gel-cushioned beds, retailing from \$1,399 to \$3,499, Rossdeutscher said.

Swedish bedding maker Hastens, in its second High Point showing, has seen interest in its high-end beds on the upswing, said Janet Stein, country manager for the United States. "We've seen nice increases in the awareness of our products and in the people seeking us out," she said.

Hastens is broadening its offerings here with a new entry-level line of frame beds, cushioned with horsehair and other natural materials, that starts at \$2,857.

On the sleep accessory front, Leggett & Platt has expanded its offerings in several key categories, including sheets, pillows and mattress protectors. Also new from

the producer is AirDream, an air mattress paired with coils that is designed for the sofa-sleeper mattress replacement market.

L&P's market started strong with nice increases in attendance, said Herman Tam, group vice president of the Consumer Products Group. "Our message is, 'The recession is over. Take a look at what we have to offer,'" he said. "We are helping retailers energize their business. As a leader, Leggett & Platt is spreading a message of optimism."

Regional bedding producer Park Place joined the mattress mix this market. "High Point has quickly developed a core competency in bedding," said Jimmy Orders, president. "I see that as an opportunity for growth."

Magniflex, meanwhile, is attracting attention with new specialty mattresses, including one cushioned with Outlast and one featuring a lavender treatment in the ticking.