

## Old Toilet Seat Maker Closes

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**AP** [apnews.com/article/37a253c4624fe7aa1988749d8f8b8085](https://apnews.com/article/37a253c4624fe7aa1988749d8f8b8085)

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MONSON, Mass. (AP) \_ For 86 years, Church Seat Co. made what it proudly proclaimed "the best seat in the house." But hindered by declining sales and outmoded equipment, one of the country's oldest toilet seat makers is closing.

"We had our last production day last Friday," said Gary Fusik, operations manager. "And after this stuff is shipped, all that will be left will be six office and administrative people."

"It's just one of those things," said Dorothy Kibbe of Monson, an assembler at the plant for 30 years. "There's nothing you can do about it."

The Church Seat Co. was founded in Holyoke in 1898 by C.F. Church, who stamped his name on all of his products and made what he called "The Best Seat in the House."

The firm employed 750 people in this town of 7,500 and had plants in several towns in Massachusetts and Brattleboro, Vt.

By 1968, the Bemis Manufacturing Co. of Sheboygan Falls, Wisc., the country's largest toilet-seat manufacturer, bought Church Seat, then employing 200. Seventy-six were left in January when Bemis announced it was consolidating its toilet seat making operations in Wisconsin.

The office equipment and machinery "down to the screwdrivers" has been sold to the Health-Tek Co. in nearby Palmer, which makes adult diapers. A real estate investor has obtained an option to purchase the mill buildings and plans to lease the space to small industries.

"It was basic business decision in terms of dollars and cents," Fusik said, blaming the closing on declining sales and outmoded equipment.

For some workers, the closing ended a way of life.

"Who wants an old guy," said Bob Berry, 62, of Monson, who had worked at the plant for 37 years.

The company has offered jobs to workers willing to relocate in Wisconsin, Fusik said. "At the moment, most of the people are looking to see what they can find around here, but the invitation is open until June 1."

Valerie Avery of Stafford Springs, Conn., one of 14 workers who went on a company-paid trip to Wisconsin in February, said "everything was so nice and clean. It was wonderful."

She said her husband is in poor health and after 28 years at Church Seat it would be hard to leave.

"It was a shock," she said. "We kind of expected it, but we just kept hoping. I'm 60, so at my age, to get another job is difficult. I'll get a week's vacation out of it and then I'll really start looking."