



Blue Heron Linens



Automation Investment Doubles Throughput, Cuts Labor in Half

By Haley Jorgensen

Blue Heron Linens, in Savannah, Ga., a premier provider of commercial laundry services to the hospitality market, recently invested in Girbau Industrial (GI) ironing and folding solutions. Now with doubled production, slashed labor and elevated quality, owner Michael Wine anticipates a 12-month return on investment and a growth path to new business.

The Automation Advantage

Following the pandemic, operational costs skyrocketed. "In a year's time, Savannah area labor costs increased from \$9 to \$22 per hour, while natural gas quadrupled," Wine said. Tired of chasing labor, Wine connected with Brennan Pollnow, national sales manager at Girbau Industrial (GI). Together, they came up with an automation solution that ultimately reduced the plant's dependency on labor and natural gas.

As part of that plan, Wine replaced three old ironers with a highly flexible ironing line — a GI DR1+ single-station clip feeder, a single-roll PC 120 ironer and an FRB Folder with side-stacker. He also added an FTB towel folder.

Ironing System Doubles Production, Enhances Quality, Cuts Labor

"The new versatile ironing system offers the flexibility of automatically feeding large items with one operator, like sheets and duvets," said Pollnow, "or manually feeding small items with 1 to 4 operators in 1, 2 or 4 lanes, like napkins, pillowcases and tabletops."

The DR1+ feeder features a vacuum table that holds and smooths items as they move toward the ironer. As items enter and pass through the ironer, they are automatically dried and ironed. Finally, linens pass through the FRB Folder, which performs two to three primary folds and up to three cross folds, as needed. Finally, linens are automatically stacked and returned to operators.

The result is a high-quality finish at high-speed production rates, according to Wine. The ironing line processes 5-6 sheets per minute — helping to launch Blue Heron Linens' daily throughput from 4,000 to 10,800 laundry pounds per 8-hour shift. These impressive results quickly prompted the addition of a



second identical system.

"Quality, with no exaggeration is flawless," said Wine. "We couldn't have hoped for a better outcome. Production improved dramatically with increases of hundreds of pieces per hour with virtually no misfeeds or misfolds. This helps prevent rewashes and further improves efficiency."

Towel Folder Impact

Setting the stage for excellence in another area of the plant, the GI FTB Single Sort Dry Goods Folder folds and stacks towels and blankets of varying dimensions. It quickly processes everything from pool towels to bath towels and blankets at rates of up to 900 pieces per hour with a single operator.

Together with the ironing line it's cut costly labor hours by 50 percent — a big win for Wine. The boost in production and decrease in labor costs means Blue Heron Linens will realize a quick ROI along with improved profit margins.

"We are surrounded by resort beach customers," said Wine. "With the FTB, we have the potential to fold 7,000 pool towels within an 8-hour shift."

Opening Doors to Opportunity

And he aims to do it with a flawless product. "We doubled in size in a year and a half," said Wine. "Our enormous gains in throughput now allow us to grow into markets we haven't dreamed of before."