

New film technology leads to Kalart Victor closing

By MARY LEWIS
Courant Staff Writer

PLAINVILLE — Every technological advance has a victim.

Kalart Victor Corp., the last U.S. manufacturer of 16mm film projectors, is one of them.

The 67-year-old company, which made projectors and film-editing machines for government, business, industry, education and churches, is closing, bowing to the strength of foreign competition and the appeal of a new technology: videocassettes and camcorders.

"We're the sole manufacturer, the last of the Mohegans," said Leonard J. Quartin, company president. "We were unable to develop or secure a new product that would replace the loss of that product."

As he signs the closing papers today and stores the last file, Quartin will be shutting the door on another time: when the company's product was state of the art, when small American businesses thrived with little foreign competition and when employees spent their entire careers working at one firm.

The plant shows the signs of age, appearing to have changed little in its 42 years. Long rows of about 500 old machines sit under hanging fluorescent lights. Big wooden desks and chairs are empty in the offices, looking like a set of an old black-and-white movie.

In its heyday, Kalart Victor employed 250 people and won the president's "E" award for excellence in exporting in 1966, said Quartin, who has worked for the company for more than 52 years.

Morris Schwartz founded the company in 1922 in Brooklyn, N.Y., as an industrial photographic laboratory. Through the years the company produced flash equipment and range finders, telescopes and compasses as well as aerial plotting equipment during World War II.

Schwartz, a former darkroom technician for the New York Herald and New York Times, invented a "camera of tomorrow" that used 4-by-5 plates and was smaller than the large press photographer cameras that smoked when the shutter was pressed. He also invented the synchronized flash, which ensured that a flash was brightest when the shutter was open, Quartin said.

"The company was ahead of its time," he said.

Schwartz' camera, which came out in 1947, was made obsolete in 1954 when the 35mm camera was developed, Quartin said.

The company bought several other manufacturers. In 1956 Kalart bought Victor Animatograph Corp. of Davenport, Iowa, a pioneer in the 16mm projector. The company kept up with the trend in 1965 for large-

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Ingrid Overgard / Special to The Courant

Leonard Quartin, president of Kalart Victor in Plainville, shows some of the equipment the company manufactured during its 67 years.



HERALD PHOTO — DAVID PAVANO

THE END OF AN ERA

Leonard J. Quartin, president of Kalart Victor Corp., is surrounded by some of the projection equipment the

Plainville company has made. The 67-year-old company will close on Monday.

Kalart Victor, last manufacturer in U.S. of movie projectors, closing in Plainville

By William R. Neagus
HERALD REPORTER

PLAINVILLE — One of the first American manufacturers to be affected by Japanese competition following World War II is calling it quits, unable to continue its 40-year battle for the world market.

It is the only remaining firm in the United States making

movie film projectors.

Kalart Victor Corp., manufacturers of movie projectors, educational television products, audio visual and film editing equipment, will close its 65,000 square-foot Hultenius Street plant on Monday.

It will also mean the end of American participation in an industry once dominated by people like Morris Schwartz, Kalart Victor's founder and

chairman of the board.

Leonard J. Quartin, company president, explained that the 67-year old firm's business has spiraled downward since the beginning of the 1980s. That's when video cassette recorders (VCR) and hand-held camcorders became popular.

"The ease of using a cartridge or cassette far outweighs the steps in making movies where you have to put reels on

the projector," said Quartin. "The interest in VCRs created a decline in 16 millimeter projectors and film. Home movies have disappeared, taken over by camcorders."

Unfortunately, he added, all VCRs and camcorders are manufactured in Japan.

Ten years ago there were five American and one Japanese manufacturers of 16 millimeter projectors. Now there are three Japanese manufacturers and one American — Kalart Victor, Quartin said.

Meanwhile, the industry has gone from producing as many as 100,000 projectors annually, to just 15,000. To survive in the smaller market the Japanese have been reducing their prices so low that Kalart Victor can no longer compete, he said.

At its peak during the 1970s the company employed 250 people, but that figure has dropped to less than 50 within the past year. Yesterday was the last work day for the bulk of the remaining employees, leaving a handfull to clean the plant be-

VCRs spelled sayonara for firm

By William R. Neagus
HERALD REPORTER

PLAINVILLE — Walking into the Kalart Victor Corp. plant is like taking a trip back in time.

There is no plush modern office furniture. The desks and chairs are wooden, not metal or plastic. If there are any computers, they're not apparent.

Kalart Victor's main product

line — 16 millimeter movie projectors — is also like a blast from the past. That's part of the problem, the reason why Kalart Victor will officially go out of business Monday after 67 years.

JAPANESE COMPETE

Leonard J. Quartin, president of the company since 1967, explained it couldn't keep up with Japanese technology. Japanese-made video cassette recorders (VCR) and camcorders

have replaced Super 8, eight millimeter, and 16 millimeter home movie cameras and 16 millimeter reel-to-reel projectors.

But, Quartin said, "we're going out with dignity. We're not going into bankruptcy and we've made arrangements to make sure all our former customers continue to have access to parts and service."

The firm was founded in 1922

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HERALD PHOTO — DAVID PAVANO

EQUIPMENT CHECK

Leonard Quartin, president, and Jean Dupuis, an electronic technician for Kalart

Victor for 32 years, test an amplifier for a 16mm projector at the Plainville company.

★ Kalart

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fore the company closes its doors for good on Monday, said Quartin.

He said he had written to U.S. Rep. Nancy L. Johnson (R-Conn.) and former U.S. Sen. Lowell P. Weicker Jr. (R-Conn) about being constantly underbid by the Japanese but to no avail.

"She's interested in the bearing industry," said Quartin. "We're just a small company with less than 50 people."

The first time Kalart Victor encountered Japanese competition was just after World War II.

Schwartz began the manufacturing aspect of the business by inventing a flash bulb synchronizer. It was a device that insured the shutter of a camera opened at the peak of the flash bulb's flash.

"It revolutionized the market for press photography," said Quartin.

But when Japan's industry began rebuilding after World War II two Japanese manufacturers began producing the flash equipment for lower prices than Kalart Victor. Quartin said the prices were too low and his company stopped producing the flash equipment.

That was the first encounter. But instead of stopping the production of just one product line, he said the company is stopping everything.