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a very successful showing at the August NASCAR race at Bristol Motor

GS2 is currently on location at the General Shale Christmas Village, which is part of Speedway in Lights, an annual Christmas event held each year at Bristol Motor Speedway that benefits more than 50 local children’s charities.

“The trailers are very convenient for both the customers and our employees at locations where the trailers can be accommodated,” says Bryan Hoilman, plant manager, Piney Flats. “There’s very little setup involved, just hook to a power source, open the doors, and we’re ready to show off our basic selling products.”

As with GS1, the weight of various products was a concern, but there was a solution. “We thin-cut all the featured kits so they have the same look but a third of the actual weight,” Hoilman says. “The inside is the showroom, but the exterior is a traveling billboard as we travel from location to location. We’ve been getting calls from people who see us on the road. It’s been a good ambassador for General Shale.”

Two General Shale plants are to be congratulated on achieving safety milestones. The Rome, Georgia, plant has reported one million hours of no lost-time accidents. The employees there have been lost-time-accident-free since September 2005.

And in Roanoke, our plant is celebrating three million hours of no lost-time accidents, which, according to Brian Ogle, Corporate Safety and Risk manager, might be an industry first. The workers there have been working without a lost-time accident since June 2000.

“A safe working environment is part of the success profile initiative of building with a clear conscience,” Ogle says. “We’re always looking for ways to improve safety on the floor, like our stellar safety and health programs, our on-site inspections and having our employees looking for potential dangers every day.”

Ogle says it’s very important to hear from employees on ways to improve safety in the plants. “Our Success Profile initiative allows each employee to be our eyes and ears on the floor as they send us suggestions on how to make a great company even greater. By encouraging our employees to use the suggestion boxes or go online, we can continue to go down this path of recognizing potential hazards before they cause an accident.”

The two plants with no lost-time accidents will be recognized in various ways for their achievements. Congratulations, Rome and Roanoke!

As Generals, we have an extra day to get things done in 2012 because it was a leap year. Yet the progress we’ve made in the past year wasn’t due to an extra day. It was because of the extra effort of our employees every day in making this a good year.

We were focused on being more productive, in becoming more innovative with exciting new products, and by marketing our products to a broader audience of potential buyers. I am happy to report that our efforts are making a positive difference.

In 2013, we will continue to take market share from our competitors by being the high-touch company that builders, contractors and homeowners expect. We will sell more of our products to consumers who are renovating their homes and businesses as well as sprucing up their backyards. We will introduce ourselves to more architects and designers who can specify our products to large commercial and residential projects. We will also build an even stronger bond with the thousands of contractors who help support our company for more than 80 years.

We will focus harder on being the expert for building professionals through innovative and exciting new products, such as our new Endurance R44® structural brick that can offer amazing energy efficiency and safety from severe weather such as high winds and seismic activity.

As we pause for the holidays to reflect on our past and anticipate our future, I am grateful for the many accomplishments we shared success in 2012. I am confident of the positive results of your efforts and continued dedication. I have never been more enthusiastic about our future as I am today. I hope that you share my passion. Together, we will make 2013 another year of continued growth and achievement at General Shale.

May you have a very Merry Christmas, enjoy the holidays with family and celebrate what this time of year is all about.

Sincerely,

Richard “Duck” Green
President and CEO
General Shale

“Driving

“This is an exciting time of year with all the hustle and bustle going on, but with this time of year come earlier dark skies and questionable weather. Young drivers are out of school and on the roads more frequently during Christmas break; it’s a good idea to practice some defensive driving skills,” says Brian Ogle, Corporate Safety and Risk manager. “Also make sure your headlights and brake lights are working properly so you’re not the cause of an accident. Don’t forget to keep safety items like blankets, water, snacks, a flashlight and a cell phone charger in your car. And please do NOT text and drive. If you must take a call or text someone, find a safe place to pull off the road to use your phone.”

“You’ve probably seen those YouTube videos of dry trees igniting and burning in a matter of seconds. Don’t place a live tree near a heating source (fireplace, baseboard heat, external heaters that use kerosene, etc.) and be careful with lights, closely following the manufacturer’s instructions. Be sure to unplug Christmas lights when you are out of the room or sleeping, or upgrade your Christmas lighting to LED. Older light sets are not only a danger from years of use and abuse but also consume more power.

If you use a ladder to hang lights or at any other time, inspect your ladder before you use it. Have someone with you when you’re on the ladder to keep the base steady. A good rule of thumb is the 4:1 rule for safe ladder positioning. “For every four feet of elevation, pull the ladder out from the base one foot,” Ogle says. And although brick made from General Shale is an excellent product, bricks are NOT made to put under the ladder for higher elevation. Ogle says. “Taking a six-foot ladder and cutting off a couple of feet doesn’t make it a four-foot ladder, it makes it a hazard,” he added. Watch out for the power lines around your home. Every year families suffer because an aluminum ladder makes accidental contact with power lines, and the results are deadly.

Decorating

Holiday decorating can be fun and something a family looks forward to every year, but it can come with its share of dangers as well. If you use a live tree inside the home, be sure to keep it watered. You’ve probably seen those YouTube videos of dry trees igniting and burning in a matter of seconds. Don’t place a live tree near a heating source (fireplace, baseboard heat, external heaters that use kerosene, etc.) and be careful with lights, closely following the manufacturer’s instructions. Be sure to unplug Christmas lights when you are out of the room or sleeping, or upgrade your Christmas lighting to LED. Older light sets are not only a danger from years of use and abuse but also consume more power.

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Economic environment looks to be improving in construction industry

If you put “more houses to be built” on your Christmas list, it looks like you might get your wish. Mark Kimer, General Shale’s vice president of Corporate Development & Marketing, says most construction forecasts call for a 15-20% increase in new housing starts over last year.

“We feel good about where we’re headed. Even though this housing start number is an improvement, it’s still low based on historic numbers. But for the first time in five years things are moving in a positive direction for the industry,” Kimer said.

In the past few years we have seen some of the lowest construction starts since the 1960s, and that of course hurts the brick industry. Not only are fewer houses being built, but the type and style of home have also affected the industry. In 2012, the market built more “entry level” homes where brick isn’t always used. However, forecasters say next year in addition to more homes being built, the homes will be bigger, which lends to more brick being used.

“We may not get back to large-scale homes, but the outlook is for larger than entry-level homes, which allows more use of brick,” Kimer said.

Despite the encouraging forecasts, the economy is still in a delicate balance, especially as turmoil continues in Washington and around the world. General Shale will maintain its drive and focus with new products that consumers are looking for and on being the industry leader in innovation.

“We are working diligently in product development so we can approach that (R20 standard) in a broad, direct manner. We have done that already with outdoor living and thin veneers, and we will continue to innovate products. We have some new lines that we are excited about and will launch in the coming year,” Kimer added.

With the popularity of the outdoor living and thin veneer products as well as traditional brick, General Shale looks to have a good year in 2013.

COOKING
If you’re thinking about frying that holiday turkey, take it outside, away from your home or any structure (never fry a turkey indoors). If the fryer were to tip and the oil spill, it could quickly cause a house fire, so be smart and keep a fire extinguisher nearby. Fry the turkey outside on a level area. Dirt or a concrete slab are your best choices. However, splattering grease can stain concrete or cement slabs. Wooden decks can catch fire, so don’t set the fryer there. Make sure the cooker is perfectly level and steadily before adding the oil. Make sure someone watches the cooking turkey at all times. Never leave it unattended – not even for a few minutes! Be sure kids and animals are kept out of the vicinity for the entire time. Allow oil to cool completely before storing or disposing of it. Never dump the oil down an outside drain or down a kitchen sink. Instead, pour it into plastic, leaded containers to dispose of it.

Remembering these safety tips and using common sense should make for a happy and safe holiday season! Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from General Shale!