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Bill Blass' New Start: NexCen to Buy Brand, Global Growth on Tap

By Vicki M. Young

NEW YORK — Design house Bill Blass is expected to be sold after an almost two-year search for a buyer.

NexCen Brands Inc. was set late Tuesday to purchase Bill Blass in a cash and stock deal valued at \$54.6 million that is intended to expand the global reach of the brand, pushing it deeper into Asia and Europe.

Referring to Bill Blass as “timeless” and “classically American,” NexCen president and chief executive officer Robert D’Loren said the acquisition was a “great opportunity” for both firms. NexCen expects the brand will generate \$10 million of royalty revenue in 2007.

Michael Groveman, ceo and co-owner of Blass, said, “The sale of Blass is an exit strategy in which the company becomes part of a public entity. This is an opportunity to become part of a company with a global reach. Bob [D’Loren] has been there since the beginning, and I couldn’t think of a better opportunity for growing the company.”

Bill Blass designer Michael Vollbracht, who had worked with the namesake designer for two years and with Groveman for five years, echoed Groveman’s opinion that D’Loren’s firm was the one to help Bill Blass grow globally.

“I keep thinking I’m the lucky man,” Vollbracht said. “I’ve watched BillBlass, and this is serendipitous to be a middle-aged man guiding Blass to a global level. Bill Blass taught me many years ago to go out and meet the customer. I know this customer. I know, hopefully, her taste level. I am thrilled to be part of the ride.”

Although the Blass brand has its roots in America, Vollbracht’s goal is to push its presence further into China and Europe.

The perception of Bill Blass is that it now appeals to a wider age group, rather than mostly to



women in their 50s. Last year, First Lady Laura Bush wore a long-sleeved, yellow and orange floral chiffon dress to an official dinner hosted by the President for Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his wife, Gursharan Kaur. More recently, actress Angelina Jolie graced the cover of *Vogue* wearing Blass.

