**Bechyne. Small town of great importance**

***Pottery and stove building has begun to develop in a small town on the river Luznice at the beginning of the 16th century. Products of local masters were sold not only in Prague's Kampa, but gradually gained recognition throughout the whole Europe. Today, the brand JIKA follows up on the quality and 134 years old tradition of production in Znojmo, while the plant in Bechyne celebrates 50 years since its foundation.***

The biggest development of pottery production in Bechyne was recorded in the second half of the 19th century, exactly in 1875 when a factory for tiled stoves and clay pots was built. Another important milestone was the establishment of the Ceramic stock company at the beginning of the 20th century, which has produced hundreds of kinds of quality products for the domestic and foreign market for fifty years.

After 1948, the Ceramic stock company was renamed to the South Bohemian ceramics - JIKA and the development of this brand was supported also by a modern manufacturing plant for bathroom ceramics production, which was built in the early 60‘s in the eastern part of the town. In 1991, Jika within privatization teamed up with the Swiss Ceramic Holding AG Laufen and eight years later became a part of the Spanish group Roca. The partnership with the leading European producer of sanitary ceramics started the next stage of company development and significantly strengthened the competitiveness of Czech products abroad.

**Plant in Bechyne today**

****The plant in Bechyne has gone through lots of changes over the past fifty years. Nowadays, it employs 340 people and produces 1,340,000 pieces of products per year. It has been one of the most modern plants in Europe since 1961 and even nowadays still it uses the top-class technological equipment that can improve the manufacturing process and bring a series of energy savings and environmental considerations. For example, the average water consumption was reduced from 2005 to 2009 thanks to an improved technology of water treatment, sewage disposal plant, and changes in manufacturing processes in a production hall. In 2005, the plant consumed 11,358 m3 of water while in 2009 it was already only 5,826 m3 (48% reduction). About 6 million were invested to the modernization of water treatment technology from 2005 to 2009. These investments have brought an improvement to the process of water purification and allowed increased recirculation of wastewater during the manufacturing process.

A unique technological innovation is represented by a so-called pressure toilet casting, which was installed within the group of LAUFEN for the first time in Bechyne. This step confirmed confidence of the management group in the ability of the working team in Bechyne that is supervised by Miroslav Vovesny. Currently, they expand the technological capacity and consider its installation in Switzerland during the next year.

**Brand Jika**

Overall, brand JIKA has transformed into a modern dynamic company that is constantly expanding the range of its products and strives to bring quality at an affordable price to customers. That also ensures its continuous popularity throughout the world. "*Since its establishment, brand JIKA has a leading position among domestic producers of sanitary ceramics. At the same time, its popularity increases in the markets of Ukraine, the Baltics, Russia, but also in Western Europe, Middle East and other regions. At all those places, South Bohemian pottery is a symbol of tradition and quality for hundred and thirty-four years,*” Ingrid Hejkalová, marketing manager of LAUFEN CZ, explains the position of the traditional Czech brand.