

SEAMS' Member Spotlight: Cockpit USA

Note: Each edition of our newsletter, SEAMS features one of our esteemed members. In this edition of SEAMS Member Spotlight, Cockpit USA, New York City, is featured. Jacky Clyman, executive vice president and owner, responds to questions submitted by Devin Steele.

Year founded: 1975

Primary specialties: Made-in-USA outerwear for men and women – textile, leather and sheepskin aviation- and military-inspired or replica, personalized programs for corporations, supplying military outerwear to U.S. government agencies as well as international Air Forces and Navies, working with TV shows and movies on wardrobe needs.

Number of employees / locations? About 25 between Manhattan and New Jersey, where its warehouse and sample-cutting facility is located.

Company's differentiators?

"We design, develop in the USA and source worldwide for the best leathers, textiles and sheepskin, although we prefer sourcing in the USA whenever possible as long as the quality and reliability are there. Having a graphic department and sample making in the USA gives us an edge for special projects as well as working with movie and TV costume departments, e.g. supplied the Nomex CWUs for the new current Top Gun movie. We can also make small runs as well as larger ones.

I read that in 1986 you became the US Air Force's first official A-2 Leather Pilot Jacket supplier. Do you still supply the U.S. military? And please tell us more about your supplier history with the military.

"In the early 1980s we supplied the U.S. government through numerous contracts making a variety of products such as N2Bs, MA-1s, N3Bs, CWUs, flight suits for NASA and DARPA. In 1986 Col. "Hoss" Jones from the Thunderbirds contacted us to work with the U.S. Air Force to bring back the iconic Air Force A-2 for uniform wear. We supplied the first official A-2's being made since 1943 when they had stopped being issued. We then made the jackets under contract starting in 1990. We continue to supply individual units with our A-2 but not under contract. We make the Navy G-1 for the Navy Museum store."

As such, please speak to the importance of the Berry Amendment to your business, and whether or not you are involved with lawmakers or other government officials on keeping it strong.

"The Berry Amendment has its place as long as the requirements don't work against providing a top-notch product. The requirement, for example, to use USA goatskins for the A-2 and the G-1 created a problem as there were not enough goats to produce the A-2 and the subsequent product was not as appealing as the one we make and originally supplied under contract using the highest quality imported goatskin, even though the jacket is 100 percent made in the USA. Many companies actually import cut and partially sewn jackets, which they then apply a made in USA label and sell at a much reduced cost."

Please tell us something else that's special about the company.

"Jeff Clyman, who founded the company in 1975 and was originally under the Avirex name, was the first to bring the 'flight' jackets into commercial wear in the '70s. In addition, while trying to re-create the flight jackets and sheepskin bombers, he worked with a chemist at a tannery in Texas in the late '70s to develop a 'leatherized' finish for the outside of the sheepskin jackets, which is today used by so many

companies all over the world. This finish, which in WWII, was a very 'painted' finish that was extremely stiff then became the more flexible version you see today."

How has your company adapted over the last few years to remain competitive?

"For a while we expanded into a whole line of sportswear but in the last four or five years the company has decided to concentrate on its DNA outerwear with some accessories and T-shirts. This concentrates the efforts and makes the product timeless and seasonless."

What are your thoughts on the made-in-America movement and do you have a strategy in place, stated or otherwise, to produce or source in this country?

Made in America was always at the core of the company's ethos and we continue until this day making as much as we can here, although it is getting very difficult to source made-in-USA components from zippers to cuffs and waistbands to snaps!"

What are the biggest challenges and opportunities in bringing manufacturing back to the USA?

"Lack of suppliers making what we need and an aging population in the sewing and cutting area."

What is your business outlook for your company for the foreseeable future?

"We are always optimistic and hope local governments will realize that they need to invest in education to bring back the concept of manufacturing to the current generations."

Please offer a comment on business conditions, your opinion on the health of the apparel/textile/sewn products industry markets you serve now and going forward and what things will make you successful in this environment?

"I unfortunately see a decline in products fully made in the USA. Mills closed. Current generations want to sit behind a computer and not behind a sewing machine or involved in the 'making.' Hopefully, machinery will become available to help but that will require skilled workers. Our country has not developed a new version of 'trade schools.' This would be key to helping the USA redevelop itself in a manufacturing nation."

How long have you been a member of SEAMS and please speak to the value it brings?

"I think we have been a member of SEAM for at least 15 years and it's a great resource to turn to find suppliers."