



THE ASSOCIATION & VOICE OF THE US SEWN PRODUCTS INDUSTRY

## SEAMS April 2020 Newsletter

### Lead story

## **SEAMS members pivot into PPE overdrive to prove resiliency, importance of U.S. sewn products/textile/fashion industry**

By Devin Steele

Stepping up. Answering call. Rallying around.

Those are but a few of the phrases used to describe a number of SEAMS' members in recent weeks during the global COVID-19 pandemic. By pivoting production (in most cases) to address the critical shortage of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), these member companies have put real, tangible *ACTION* into these verbs and are making a tremendous difference in the health, safety and well-being of many in the USA.

As the go-to resource for our incredible industry, SEAMS appreciates those of you who have been willing and able to respond to this crisis, according to Executive Director, Will Duncan.

"I've been a part of this industry for more than 35 years, and I've never seen a time when the U.S. fashion, sewn products and textile industries have coalesced around a common cause for the good of humankind," he said. "As this global health emergency was beginning to reach U.S. shores and expand to pandemic proportions, SEAMS' members were among the first to heed the call from those on the frontlines in need of equipment to keep them safe. For most, moving into the PPE arena required a lot of time, effort and commitment by leaders and your employees.

"As I hear your stories and learned everything it has taken to shift operations, I have never been prouder of SEAMS' members and your teams," he added. "What you've done is beyond amazing and demonstrates what can be accomplished when we all unite to work together. It certainly proves our flexibility, resilience and merit as an industry and speaks volumes about why U.S. manufacturing is important."

As you've probably read in a series of emails over the last couple of weeks, SEAMS has shared with members a number of these stories – some reluctantly, of course, as most prefer to "do the right thing" without any fanfare. But with a little arm-twisting, most consented to being featured after agreeing that now is the time for an oft-maligned industry to have its day in the spotlight – especially among the general populace that may think the U.S. textile/sewn products industry is dead or on life support.

"In the coming days, these stories will be highlighted in a press release SEAMS is sending to the national media, as well as trade, regional and local print and online publications," Duncan said. "If any of these outlets contact you for more information, we highly encourage you to participate in order to tell the true story of the importance of the industry to the nation."



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By providing access to people, processes and products to move production back to the U.S., SEAMS as you know serves as the hub for networking, inspiration, innovation and intelligence to enhance members' competitiveness, productivity and profitability in the new global economy, he added. Supercharging the American supply chain, SEAMS is the most relevant force shaping the growth and resurgence of Made in America, he noted.

Early on during the COVID-19 outbreak in the U.S., SEAMS announced a community program for manufacturers to pitch in and help not only their members but the entire industry in a time of crisis where our country is experiencing shortages of medical products and loss of capacity to keep the supply chain strong. Working in concert with the National Council of Textile Organizations (NCTO); INDA, Association of the Nonwovens Fabrics Industry; the Industrial Fabrics Association International (IFAI); the Manufacturing Solutions Center in Conover, N.C.; and large brands, SEAMS created the program to provide open capacity to help manufacturers in need where their own factories were closed or could not meet production requirements.

[SEAMS' PPE Pattern Resource Hub](#) was created to centralize many patterns required to produce PPE products from home creations to approved medical products for easy access.

As most Americans have done the right thing to help "flatten the curve" of new coronavirus cases and hospitalizations, many SEAMS members have worked diligently to do their part in helping protect healthcare workers, their own employees and members of the general public. Several have been able to use their connections through the SEAMS network to find resources and build the supply chain needed to narrow the shortage of PPE.

One of those members who has benefited from SEAMS' membership happens to be its president, Jeff Bodenhorst Jr.

"Thanks to SEAMS, I have come to know so many individuals with focuses on many different sewn products," Bodenhorst, president of LACorp, Lebanon, Va., said during a recent joint [SEAMS/SPESA webinar](#) covering "Supply Chain Dynamics Amid COVID-19." "These contacts have been tremendously helpful in assisting PPE production. The networking has been absolutely incredible – sharing ideas, sharing patterns, sharing different constructions, etc. For instance, I'm taking pictures of setups and sending it to members across the country."

His company, a cut-and-sew contractor, is also part of the Hanes coalition of textile producers and apparel brands producing PPE, and LACorp is currently producing face masks and reusable gowns and is working on production lines for disposable gowns, other types of N95 masks and waterproof hospital bed covers. On April 13, LACorp shipped its first PPE – a pallet of 22,500 face masks, and also had its first gown line in production.

This unprecedented crisis also helped another member, Minnesota Knitting Mills (MKM) of Mendota Heights, Minn., recognize even more the value of SEAMS' membership, according to Britt Moore, director of sales and customer services.

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“If the last four weeks has shown us anything, it is clear that the vision of the SEAMS organization is urgently needed in the textile industry in the U.S.,” he said. “Much of the conversation that we have had with customers and other partners are the same conversations that we have had within the SEAMS organization for the past few years.”

MKM had to make only a slight pivot into PPE and other medical goods to address the demand for these products for the healthcare industry. The company already was supplying PPE products and other related medical products, including medical cuffs and several types of fabric, but in lower volumes than it is producing currently, Moore said. Some of its fabrics are being repurposed for new types of applications, he added.

Meanwhile, OnPoint Manufacturing of Florence, Ala., also took advantage of its connections in the SEAMS’ network to help switch its operations into full protective mask production in a matter of three days, according to J. Kirby Best, founder, president & CEO.

“We have a terrific relationship with (fellow SEAMS’ member) Gerber Technology, which formed a Global PPE Task Force that has brought together more than 600 manufacturers, technology partners and industry coalition partners to make PPE products available broadly around the world,” said Best, whose company is part of the coalition.

Gerber’s Lenny Marano, vice president of Product Management and Marketing, added that relationships he developed through organizations such as SEAMS helped the Tolland, Conn.-based company quickly grow the coalition, which counts SEAMS among its partners.

“We built a list of all the material suppliers and various producers that we know from all the different industry associations in which we’re affiliated, including SEAMS,” he said.

### **Firsts for many members**

While many companies across the U.S. were facing the prospect of temporary closures, layoffs or furloughs as the country was shutting down, SEAMS’ members that were willing and able to contribute to the PPE cause have been able to keep most if not all of their employees working and, in some cases, have been busier than normal, they said in SEAMS’ feature articles or during the webinar. For some leaders, a number of “firsts” were realized.

Contempora Fabrics, a Lumberton, N.C.-based knitter and also a member of the Hanes coalition, saw its normal apparel business abruptly decline the week of March 16 when the crisis started to heavily impact the Western Hemisphere, with Central American companies where it ships a lot of its fabric shuttering operations, said Ron Roach, company president and secretary/treasurer of SEAMS.

“During that week, every hour, something changed,” he recalled. “You couldn’t plan anything for the next day. By the end of that week, for the first time in my 35-year career, we had to lay off 185 people on that Friday.”

But things began to rapidly change with the coalition beginning to form over the next couple of days and, by Tuesday of the following week, Contempora had reopened operations with about half of its



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plant personnel, he said. Now, just about everything it is making is either military fabrics or fabric for masks or gowns, representing a big shift in its normal products.

Frank Henderson, president and CEO at Henderson Sewing Machine Co., Andalusia, Ala., also realized a first in his career as his company transitioned into the PPE world, he said.

"I haven't worked very many seven days and seven nights over the last 45 years, but I certainly have over the last three or four weeks," he said during the webinar. "I'm on about 20 regular calls a day and six or seven conference calls a day."

Henderson Sewing Machine, which supplies equipment and technology as well as systems integration tools such as robotics and automation systems and standard sewing systems, has placed dozens of automated systems in numerous states and in Canada to produce face masks in a vertically integrated supply chain, Henderson said.

For Hemingway Apparel, based in Hemingway, S.C., about 20 percent of its production dried up fairly quick shortly after COVID-19 became a pandemic, according to President Chris Marsh. But the company was able to pivot to act as a manufacturer in conjunction with the Hanes' initiative in order to make the face masks, he said.

"While we didn't lose much in the way of production, we needed to replace it fast," he said. "Most of the loss was in our shirt department. While in talks about participating and trying to learn what we needed to do as a company, Hemingway was simultaneously tearing down a shirt line and rebuilding a mask line."

### **Members proud to pitch in to cause**

Several SEAMS' members say being a part of the PPE effort has been challenging, but extremely rewarding. One of those companies, Hamrick Mills, a 120-year-old fabric maker, is producing fabrics that can and are being utilized in scrubs, gowns, masks and other PPE items.

"As a company, we are proud to be able to contribute in a meaningful way to the protection of our fellow citizens, and are sure that each of our employees take great pride in knowing that their efforts are making a difference in the fight against this pandemic," said Jim Hopkins, director of sales.

Hamrick's Gaffney, S.C., neighbor, Carolina Cotton Works (CCW), a specialty dyeing and finishing operation, is processing fabrics for masks, gowns and scrubs in various constructions, including cotton, blends and 100 percent polyester, composed of spun and filament yarns. Some are being infused with antimicrobial and DWR (durable water repellent) ingredients.

"Our employees are excited to keep working and be a part of fighting the coronavirus and protecting the hardworking doctors, nurses and everyone involved in the fight," said Stacey Bridges, sales manager. "We are happy to keep our employees working and helping companies desperate for PPE products. Everyone at CCW is ecstatic to be in a position to protect the ones fighting the coronavirus on the frontlines."



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Even Bridges son Hart, a 19-year-old freshman at the Darla Moore School of Business at the University of South Carolina, joined the effort after being sent home due to the pandemic by launching a company, Rosleck Safety, to make face masks for healthcare workers on the frontlines and for the general public. His Dad helped him find some manufacturing partners to produce the masks, and set up a [GoFundMe page](#) to support his goal of providing these masks for those heroes in scrubs.

“I know that with enough donations and sponsors, I can help those who need it the most right now and bring Americans back to work at the same time,” he said. “Just with one my Dad’s LinkedIn posts, I was able to raise enough money to make my first donation to a nursing facility in Pennsylvania last week”

Westlake, Ohio-based MMI Textiles, a converter of a wide range of textiles, moved quickly to address the need for PPE during this crisis, according to Geoff Senko, MMI’s national account manager.

“More than anything, everyone here at MMI loves our community, our first responders, our workers, our partners, our industry and America,” he said. “Therefore, if there was any way we could be of help, we wouldn’t let anything get in our way.”

When the PPE shortage quickly arose during the crisis, Clothier Design Source (CDS), a St. Paul-Minn.-based resource that offers expertise in apparel design, soft goods engineering, product development and manufacturing to enable private label brands to grow, knew it wanted to step up to the plate, according to company President Mindy Martell.

“I feel very proud and exhilarated to be making a dent in the PPE need,” she said. “I also am relentlessly trying to increase capacity and make more. The appetite is insatiable and we are determined to help in the biggest possible way. There is no sitting back and just making the orders we have.”

A. Rifkin Co., a fifth-generation, family-run manufacturing facility in Pennsylvania since 1892, specializes in reusable fabric security bags and serves a broad range of markets, including banks, elections, federal government, medical, schools, libraries and other commercial entities. The company started producing face masks, covers for N95 masks, gowns and head caps – all of which were brand new items in the company’s product repertoire.

“We are happy that we can do something to help those on the front lines,” said company President Darcy Buck.

Hickory, N.C.-based Shuford Yarns LLC, a 140-year old company that provides a broad product line of spun yarns for the industrial, home furnishing and apparel sectors. Its yarns are used in face masks, surgical gowns, hospital towels, diabetic socks, hospital socks, medical sleeves, military towels and blankets, so it didn’t need to change its production matrix much, said President & CEO Marvin Smith.

“We are very proud to be able to be a part of a specific ‘call to action’ to make sure we supply much-needed inputs for the finished medical, military and food products,” he said. “I have been proud of our associates not only helping us meet our customers’ needs but also helping our local community by taking fabrics from some of our customers and making masks for them.”

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Printcraft Co., established in 1930, specializes in the production of many different forms of tags and labels ranging from garment tags (printed and woven), law tags, heat transfer, poly-film, to thermal transfer and everything in between. So the Lexington, N.C.-based company has a natural role in the world of PPE production and, as such, is heavily involved in the PPE effort, said Ryan Smith, sales rep.

“The entire Printcraft team is heavyhearted knowing the damage COVID-19 is causing to families, friends and colleagues worldwide,” he said. “We feel confident that America will come together to defeat this invisible enemy and, once again, prove how strong and tenacious the American people are.”

Cleveland, Ohio-based apparel manufacturer National Safety Apparel® (NSA) is working in partnership with the Hanes coalition of U.S. textile companies and small- and medium-sized apparel manufacturers to produce 1.5 million+ face masks per week in the U.S. It has also partnered with a textile manufacturer and other partners to manufacture gowns, and has shifted a significant portion of our capacity to support these programs.

“Our employees are eager to help and excited to do something for the greater good by helping in the fight against this global pandemic,” said Toby Bielenberg, vice president of strategic operations.

Unionwear, a Newark, N.J.-based supplier of in USA hats, bags and binders for the promotional, fashion and uniform markets, shifted its operations to produce face shields and isolation gowns to protect healthcare employees during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Employees are proud to make a difference (with new products) – we typically make hats and bags, rarely considered ‘essential,’ ” said company founder and President Mitch Cahn. “I know that if we had a chance to help end the war on coronavirus and we punted, I couldn't live with myself.”

Prime Medical, based in Largo, Fla., quickly recognized a need for PPE as the pandemic was rapidly spreading around the world, according to Wayne Wilson, founder and executive vice president of product development and manufacturing. So, the company, the exclusive manufacturer of Clorox Healthcare™ Privacy Curtains and CloroxPro™ Scrubs and Lab Coats, pivoted its operations to produce CDC-compliant face masks.

“Our employees come to work every day energized,” he said. “They believe in what we are doing and what our mission is – do good in the world. We know we’re making a difference and, in some cases, saving lives.”

Gehring Tricot Corporation, a Dolgeville, N.Y.-based textile manufacturer founded in 1946, is making and supplying fabrics for medical masks, non-medical masks, hospital gowns, hospital curtains, medical bandages and other medical supplies.

“We’re proud to be able to step up and participate in a time of need,” said Gary Farquhar, vice president of manufacturing. “We’re not only helping the essentials, but the local community during this time. I’m extremely proud of how the company has handled itself during this crisis. Everyone has stepped up and done something that they normally would not have to do. Sacrifices have been made without complaints, and employees continue to work with pride. Without the employees, none of this is possible.”

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Aurora Specialty Textiles Group, Inc., a 137-year-old Yorkville, Ill.-based company that bleaches, finishes, coats and dyes woven, nonwovens and knit fabrics, is now supplying materials to be used in the production of cloth face masks, nonwoven antimicrobial wipes and treated fabrics to produce Level 1 and Level 2 medical gowns amid the COVID-19 crisis. Fabrics for face masks and medical gowns have not been standard products for Aurora, but because the company has capabilities to coat and finish a range of fabrics, it was well equipped to quickly pivot to produce fabric for these applications, according to President Marcia Ayala.

“Aurora employees are very excited to have an opportunity to launch new products to fight the virus,” she said. “The sense of urgency is phenomenal. Employees at every level, within every department are engaged in making a product that will help make our communities safer.”

Precision Fabrics Group of Greensboro, N.C., has made protective fabrics for years, so it did not need to transition to support the PPE effort, according to Terry Montgomery, chief technology officer and vice president of business development.

“Like everyone involved in this critical effort, we are very gratified to be in a position to supply many of the fabrics for which there is an immediate need,” he said.

Brother International Corporation, based in Bridgewater, N.J., joined the fight by donating state-of-the-art industrial sewing machines to accelerate the production of masks and address the PPE shortage.

“Brother remains committed to aiding our communities during these challenging times,” said President Don Cummins. “Given the severe and growing shortage of Personal Protective Equipment, Brother is proud to donate our products to support these stalwart manufacturers with their efforts in making masks for our frontline workers.”

## Read more

In case you read these stories of SEAMS' members stepping up, answering the call and rallying around the PPE shortage, please click on the following links:

[SEAMS' members rallying around PPE call \(LACorp, Hamrick Mills, Carolina Cotton Works\)](#)

[SEAMS' members continue to shine during our nation's crisis \(MMI Textiles, Clothier Design Source, A. Rifkin Co.\)](#)

[CALL OF DUTY: SEAMS' members going above and beyond to address PPE shortage \(Minnesota Knitting Mills, Hemingway Apparel, Shuford Yarns\)](#)



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['We have incredible American ingenuity on our side' \(OnPoint Manufacturing, Printcraft Co., Gerber Technology\)](#)

[ALL RISE: Veterans and a student step up to join PPE effort \(Henderson Sewing Machine Co., National Safety Apparel, Rosleck Safety\)](#)

['Proud to make a difference' – Unionwear, Prime Medical, Brother International pitching in to do good in the world](#)

['An awakening to the nation' \(Precision Fabrics Group, Aurora Specialty Textiles Group, Gehring Tricot Corp.\)](#)

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