

SEAMS' members continue to shine during our nation's crisis

Here, in SEAMS' continuing series of stories highlighting some of our members who are rallying around the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) shortage, we are featuring three companies – MMI Textiles, Clothier Design Source and A. Rifkin Co. – who have answered the call.

As the go-to resource for the sewn products industry, we appreciate those members who are stepping up to address the critical need for these products during the COVID-19 pandemic. As you well know, our industry plays a vital role in the health, safety and wellbeing of our citizens, and we're excited to call out these incredible efforts. We are proud of you.

If you are a member and would like to be recognized in a forthcoming article, please send your story to dsteale@etextilecommunications.com.

MMI Textiles

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.

"MMI made the decision to be as helpful as we could very early on in this pandemic," he said. "Obviously, this took a great commitment of capital and time. We value our ability to be flexible with the different products we can produce. The textile world is a complex place of yarn spinners, weavers, finishers, nonwoven producers, etc., so MMI's ability to tie all of this together is essential to supplying all our customers' needs."

During its pivot into PPE, the company has daily meetings with updates from its leadership on product offerings, lead times, performance characteristics, AAMI standards and more, he added.

"Our team came through with a 24/7 work ethic to be there for our customers' needs and questions," he said. "Simply put, leadership and teamwork have propelled us during this time."

Most of MMI's products are going to medical workers, but some of its customers are producing for consumers, as well, Senko reported.

"We had the pleasure to partner with a customer who was able to commit over 300,000 gowns to NYC health workers, and another who is making face shields for Ohio health," he said. "We received a message that a cancer outpatient facility was able to open because they received gowns made from our raw materials from our customer!" [\[Watch video here\]](#) of NYC Mayor Bill De Blasio and MMI customer Gregg Thompson of Crye Precision, the latter of whom mentions MMI Textiles at 16:36 mark. MMI supplied Crye materials for the gowns they are producing for NYC frontline healthcare workers.]

According to Senko, the team is still learning – and learning quickly.

"The curve is still being drawn," he said. "More than anything, everyone here at MMI loves our community, our first responders, our workers, our partners, our industry and America. Therefore, if there was any way we could be of help, we wouldn't let anything get in our

way. This is an industry wide effort. We couldn't do any of this without our partners or customers."

He added: "It is crazy times. I think everyone is just trying to stay as up to date as possible on requirements and keep their factories open and employees safe. When we receive these type of messages like the one mentioned – and there have been many – it's rewarding to know we have a small role in helping this situation."

MMI Textiles is fully staffed and working split shifts, he added. Half of its employees work from home and the other half of office staff is on a rotating schedule to adhere to CDC standards for social distancing. The company is maintaining typical office hours, but many of its employees are receiving calls at any time of day or night every day of the week, he said.

"Luckily, we have been expanding for the past few years and brought on a few new customer service and sales team members shortly before this took place," he said. "Talk about getting thrown into the fire!"

The lack of supply of certain raw material substrates has been the most difficult part of the process, according to Amy Bircher, the company's founder and president. SMS nonwoven material for gowns to meet Level 3 has been the most popular, and therefore requires the longest lead time. The company said it is looking for several alternative options to meltblown filtration and has a technical consultant on staff leading this endeavor, she said.

MMI Textiles also intends to implement a new stocking program for several PPE raw materials that it will offer well after the crisis is over, she noted.

"It is our intention to push for PPE to become a Berry (Amendment)-compliant product so that we don't ever get our country into this situation again," Bircher said.

Being involved in such an important endeavor is the right thing to do amid this global pandemic, Senko added.

"We thank our hospital staff workers around the country and everyone putting themselves in harm's way," he said. "Whatever we can do to get raw materials into garments to protect them, we're doing it – and giving it our best. If we can help them, then we're doing our job."

Clothier Design Source

When the PPE shortage quickly arose during the pandemic, 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.

"We have a wonderful team that just got on the phone asking government agencies what they needed," she said. "We did research on the fabric and took a chance and just ordered bulk fabrics with no orders. We rapidly prototyped more than 10 styles of masks and offered all of them up – and quickly secured contracts. Then, because we have the raw materials, we were able to take orders more quickly, so we booked three months of production almost instantly. The training on making these products is pretty minimal for assembly."

Thus far, Clothier Design Source – a strong advocate for bringing apparel production back to the U.S., Martell said – is making cloth face masks, nonwoven masks and hoods. The company has a web of partners involved from raw material suppliers, to sub-contract sewers to networkers, Martell said.

"It's been amazing to see, really, the whole nation band together to make this happen as quickly as possible," she said.

She added that the company is unclear the end user of its products, but most of its PPE is going directly to the Department of Health and Human Services (HSS) to distribute to those who need these products.

The company has remained fully staffed on the manufacturing side during this period, she added. CDS, which typically runs five shifts per week, is currently running 10, she noted.

"Most employees are proud to be helping, excited to have a job and laser focused at the task at hand," Martell said.

Clothier Design Source's biggest gap is having a pool of trained sewing operators, followed by raw materials procurement and the "bidding war" between companies offering these products, which might be driving up prices, she said.

The company's goal is to make at least 1 million pieces before the crisis is over, Martell said.

"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. Rifkin Co., a fifth-generation, family-run manufacturing facility in Pennsylvania since 1892, received a waiver to reopen after its state called for non-life-sustaining businesses to shut down because it makes products that support those industries considered essential.

The company 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. Some of those items it already was producing included mattress covers for hospitals and prisons, as well as locking document bags that were being requested from medical facilities so they could make home visits while still maintaining proper HIPAA protocol when carrying documents out.

A. Rifkin Co. also 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.

"After we received our waiver, we took a day to brainstorm, research and put a plan in place," said company President Darcy Buck. "Then, within a day of our people returning, we were already creating samples to send to some of the Pennsylvania medical facilities we had spoken with to make sure we could provide them with what they needed.

"We had a contract sewing division where our sewing operators were already very accustomed to having to learn new items, so it wasn't a huge shift for our people," she continued. "Because of all of these new items as well as a few existing, we were able to remain fully staffed.

The company is currently prioritizing needs for medical facilities first, as it has limited capacity, Buck added.

“We are happy that we can do something to help those on the front lines,” she said.
[\[Read more about A. Rifkin Co.’s PPE efforts here.\]](#)