



THE ASSOCIATION & VOICE OF THE US SEWN PRODUCTS INDUSTRY

## **ALL RISE: Veterans and a student step up to join PPE effort**

By Devin Steele

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 – Henderson Sewing Machine Co., National Safety Apparel and Rosleck Safety – 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 please send your story to [dsteeler@textilecommunications.com](mailto:dsteeler@textilecommunications.com).

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### **Henderson Sewing Machine Co.**

The leadership and technical teams at Henderson Sewing Machine Co., Andalusia, Ala., had to quickly pivot from its normal products into PPE manufacturing technologies in order to support the cause, according to President & CEO Frank Henderson.

The Andalusia, Ala.-based company, founded in 1968, introduced new, automated face mask production systems to customers throughout the USA to manufacture pleated, foldable and cup-type face mask in an automated or semi-automated supply chain. Other semi-automated systems were introduced to manufacture other PPE products.

Henderson Sewing is shipping and installing equipment and technology for PPE production into more than 25 states, he said. The company has partnered with many vendors, customers, associations, as well as state and federal agencies, Henderson noted.

Among supply chain gaps, he pointed out that he has seen several supply chain shortages of nonwoven goods to feed automated systems for the production of PPE goods.

Another role that Henderson has played has been to serve as a "conduit" of information to connect the right players in the PPE world, he said.



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Throughout the crisis, the company has retained “all of our valuable, talented staff,” Henderson said. “When the COVID-19 pandemic began, we brought all our staff together and determined this: ‘We have no idea what will happen in this pandemic ... but, we are all in this together.’ Everyone of our staff has stepped up to the plate and done whatever we have needed to do.”

Henderson added that his staff is taking extra precautionary measures every day at work. Each employee’s temperature is taken when they enter the building, they wear protective gloves and N95 masks and they practice social distancing, he said.

“The Henderson Sewing staff is proud to be involved in the COVID-19 response efforts,” he said. “I’m proud of our staff, this industry and America.”

Although Henderson’s team is working their normal, eight-hour days, he, as the company leader, has put in much more time to help the company see its way through during this crisis, he noted during a [SEAMS-SPESA joint webinar](#) this week.

“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. “I’m on about 20 regular calls a day and six or seven conference calls a day.”

But the reward has been enormous, he added.

“It’s a joy to see our textile industry working together to produce products in this country,” Henderson said. “These PPE products are essential items needed in America. I hope our government will tune in and begin to understand that these products are just as essential products as military uniforms, armaments and other items to the security of our country.”

### **National Safety Apparel**

Cleveland, Ohio-based apparel manufacturer National Safety Apparel® (NSA) is contributing to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) PPE initiatives in the fight against COVID-19.

The company is working in partnership with the HanesBrand 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.

In addition, National Safety Apparel is continuing to manufacture safety apparel for critical businesses, including electrical utilities, the Armed Forces, the U.S. Postal Service and more.



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The company is manufacturing face protection, gowns and other PPE for these essential workers to protect themselves and others in the field. This face protection is meant to discourage touching of the nose and mouth as well as decrease the spread of the wearer's airborne particles from coughing or sneezing. Flame-resistant face masks, neck gaiters, bandanas and other PPE are also being produced in order to stay compliant to flame-resistant standards on the job.

Although NSA had not produced these specific types of face masks or gowns in the past, it has been known for agile manufacturing and customizable designs in the safety apparel market since 1935. The company often designs and manufactures custom garments and launches multiple new products quarterly. With an in-house design team and two manufacturing facilities in Cleveland and Chicago, NSA is able to pivot quickly to design and begin manufacturing products needed in the fight against COVID-19.

NSA is running normal hours at both of its facilities and is working on strategies to help increase output on critical products, according to Toby Bielenberg, vice president of Strategic Operations.

"Since National Safety Apparel has designed and manufactured safety apparel and PPE in the United States for over 80 years, it was a straightforward effort for us to make these new products," he said. "Our strengths include speed to market for new products as well as our ability to customize. Our in-house design team, product management, sales, marketing, supply chain and production teams have been able to use processes already in place to manufacture these new products."

Although NSA has experienced some attendance issues during this time, like most companies with the school shutdowns and shelter-in-place orders, the company is considered an essential business and continues to operate with a full staff, Bielenberg said. Its Human Resources team is engaging with employees, supplying PPE to its team and putting cleaning and sanitization measures in place.

"The safety and health of our NSA family of employees and customers is of the utmost importance," he said.

"Our employees are eager to help and excited to do something for the greater good by helping in the fight against this global pandemic," he added.

Due to the large number of products NSA is manufacturing, goals and production numbers are always evolving, he pointed out. Its No. 1 goal is to provide all of our customers with mission critical PPE when they need it, he said.

NSA's biggest challenge has been on raw material supply, according to Bielenberg. "However, we are very fortunate to work with suppliers who are working harder than ever to ensure we have the fabrics and materials that we need," he said.

Added CEO Chuck Grossman: "We're glad to contribute our capabilities to the fight against COVID-19 and keep as many NSA workers as possible employed during these challenging times. While we are allocating significant production resources in Cleveland and Chicago to the cause, we remain committed to producing safety clothing for workers in essential businesses such as electric utilities, the Armed Forces and the U.S. Postal Service."

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## **Rosleck Safety**

As most students around the country have been sent home to study online during the COVID-19 pandemic, many likely have been overcome by boredom and restlessness without human interaction with their classmates and friends.

But not Hart Bridges, son of Stacey Bridges, sales manager at longtime SEAMS' member Carolina Cotton Works (CCW), Gaffney, S.C.

A freshman enrolled at the Darla Moore School of Business at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, S.C., the younger Bridges, well, began "building bridges" to help address the massive shortage of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). He LAUNCHED A COMPANY, Rosleck Safety, to make face masks for healthcare workers on the frontlines and for the general public.

Founding a company certainly is an ambitious endeavor by anyone, indeed borne out of boredom and, no doubt, an entrepreneurial spirit unseen in most 19-year olds.

"Back in my hometown (Gaffney, S.C.), there wasn't much to do other than watch the news and keep seeing the number of cases rise," Hart Bridges said. "To make it worse, my summer job had shut down for the foreseeable future. I saw that there was an extreme shortage of safety masks and a huge inflation of prices. So, I decided to take some money I had saved up and import some KN95 masks and market them at a more attainable price. My Dad thought I was throwing money away – that was until I sold all my inventory in one day."

After that, dad quickly jumped on board, he said, and decided to help him grow his business. Stacey Bridges put him in touch with a couple of companies that were making a superior, American-made masks, the son said. And soon, new SEAMS' member Rosleck Safety had a few U.S.-made masks on its [website](#) that were manufactured by SEAMS' member Contempora Fabrics, Indera Mills, and Creative Fabrics Services.

Quickly, online and in-person sales began to grow, but he soon began to see another issue become clearer.

"I saw something in the market that was out of my reach," Hart Bridges said. "There are frontline people fighting the virus without masks and people that cannot afford even the most attainable of safety masks. I don't make enough money to give them out for free."

So, to address this, he started a [GoFundMe page](#) for anyone who wanted 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



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LinkedIn posts, I was able to raise enough money to make my first donation to a nursing facility in Pennsylvania last week!"

Already, Rosleck Safety has various types of masks available on its website, including K95 respirator masks, nonwoven masks and cotton antimicrobial masks.

So, to all of you in ANY generation: How did you spend YOUR COVID-19 isolation?