



THE ASSOCIATION & VOICE OF THE US SEWN PRODUCTS INDUSTRY

**SEAMS' Member Spotlight:
MMI Textiles**

Note: Each edition of our newsletter, SEAMS features one of our esteemed members. In this edition of SEAMS Member Spotlight, MMI Textiles, Westlake, Ohio, is featured. Geoff Senko, the company's National Account Manager and SEAMS Director of Education, responds to questions submitted by Devin Steele.

Year founded: 1997

Primary specialties: Converter of woven and knit fabrics in the U.S. In addition to fabric converting and distribution, MMI offers a robust complimentary product line of trims and hardware to be a full-service raw material supplier to the vast sewn products manufacturing industry.

Number of employees / locations and where? Thirty, plus three outside consultants/agents.

Markets served: PPE, Military, Medical, Commercial, Apparel

Please provide a little insight into your company's history and current ownership.

Current owner and founder Amy Bircher was raised in the textile industry. As a youngster, she started working for her father and stepmother, Jim and Karen Bircher, at National Dye Works in Lynchburg, S.C. MMI Textiles opened its doors as a manufacturer's representative in 1997 to serve six Midwestern states and handle sales for Tape Craft Corporation, NDW Textiles, Inc. and Wirewright Mfg.

MMI branched out to represent 10 states by 2001, and in 2002, it started distributing product lines that complemented existing MMI lines, providing customers with reliable sourcing at competitive prices. By 2002, MMI also had begun sourcing finished product for customers both domestically and offshore. Since then, its resource base has grown to include more than 200 factories on three continents.

In 2007, Jim and Karen Bircher retired and MMI purchased NDW Textiles. MMI is a strong provider in the government contract arena, proudly selling many products that are used in support of our U.S. troops and other government agencies. Every year since its inception, MMI Textiles has experienced double-digit growth.

What are your company's differentiators – not only externally to your customers and suppliers but also internally to your employees?



THE ASSOCIATION & VOICE OF THE US SEWN PRODUCTS INDUSTRY

“Our mission is to provide unrivaled innovation through collaborative partnerships, relentlessly focused on customer satisfaction and sustainability. We are customer first, always. Our extensive product offering, innovative and hardworking team, and focus on partnerships are just some of the things that set us apart.

Internally, we are very much like a family. Life at MMI includes team-building activities, outings, trips, leadership development and much more.”

Tell us about your partnerships and processes handled inhouse.

“With MMI’s focus on partnerships and our wide-ranging product offering, including our Ursack® Brand, we use many different locations for our printing, dyeing, finishing, distribution, weaving, knitting, etc. Here, at our headquarters, we handle the most important aspect of our business with our highly motivated customer service team.”

Do you supply products to the military?

“We do not supply products directly to the military, in most cases. On occasion, we supply our tactical gear line of CORDURA®, solution dyed webbings, Printed Narrow CTEdge® products, VELCRO® Brand and ITW Nexus products directly to units on base to be used in their design or repair shops. We do often collaborate with our partners at DLA to be as best prepared for our customer base on upcoming programs, where we are lucky enough to be a partner on.”

How has your company adapted over the last few years to remain competitive, especially as much apparel production has moved offshore?

“We take so much pride in our domestic supply chain of manufacturing customers and being a partner that they can rely on. We give our best effort to be nimble enough to develop products through our supply chain partner base that our customers and most importantly, the end users need. We are very diverse and focus so much on customer service that we try to really remain relevant with our customer base by leaving a lasting impression that we will go above and beyond to meet their needs, understand their capacity, and deliver our products on time.

“We are very excited to launch our new Made in the USA line of environmentally preferred performance fabrics to this market. EcoThriv™ is purposefully designed for responsible yet resilient performance apparel and active wear. This line of fabrics was developed to keep our environmental footprint small while still performing at a high level. They are perfect for end uses including, but not limited to, fleece and quarter-zip jackets, leggings, pants, shorts, dresses, rompers, base layers and t-shirts.



THE ASSOCIATION & VOICE OF THE US SEWN PRODUCTS INDUSTRY

“We believe in a strong U.S. textile marketplace and look forward to being part of its roaring come back, especially with our SEAMS membership!”

What are your thoughts on the Made-in-America Movement and what is your ongoing strategy to produce or source in this country?

“Over my 10-year career, I have learned a great deal from our ownership and management team. We take an enormous amount of pride in playing even a small role in supplying our warfighters and in the COVID-19 pandemic, our frontline workers, with the raw materials they need to protect themselves as much as possible. This drives us to constantly be looking for ways to improve our processes so we can be in the front of the pack when it comes to new developments or knowledge to pass along to our partners.

“The Made in America Movement will benefit tremendously from the manufacturers we have here in the USA because of the Berry and Kissel amendments. We are very supportive of the bipartisan efforts currently taking place to move PPE production here to our shores. In addition to our current tactical and commercial business lines including our EcoThriv™ developments, we have invested heavily in providing USA made products for some of the largest PPE mask and gown programs nationwide. We have even expanded our warehousing recently to the west coast to better serve our customers in those areas.

What are the biggest challenges and opportunities manufacturing to the USA?

“At this point, the biggest challenge will certainly be hiring individuals with the sewing or manufacturing skills to produce products needed to keep up with demand. This is also an opportunity of sorts, because we’ve positioned ourselves so strategically in such a wide variety of markets and trade organizations, that we hope our knowledge of the supply chain will allow us to stay a step ahead in supply chain preparedness.”

How did the coronavirus crisis affect your business? And please explain your PPE pivot.

“This is a tough question because there are so many aspects to the answer. First, our management team was most concerned with our wellbeing from a health standpoint as well as psychological. We have had their support to know that they would do their best to keep us working and essential, that our families would stay supported and our needs would be met.

“With that burden removed, our team worked tirelessly, all hours of the day, every day of the week from the beginning of the pandemic through the present. We educated ourselves the best we could through our SEAMS and IFAI partnerships and worked to provide a long list of PPE products including woven and nonwoven fabrics for gowns and masks, TPUs for face



THE ASSOCIATION & VOICE OF THE US SEWN PRODUCTS INDUSTRY

shields, elastics, nose wire and knit products from USA and beyond to keep up with the demand. Our business has certainly grown from this domestic supply chain PPE push and we have certainly committed to our suppliers and customer base to make this a staple in our product offering. We hope we do not fall into a supply chain issue ever again here in the U.S. and we will do our best to ensure that.”

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

“We have always been a forward-looking company with a very positive and aggressive mindset. Amy has hired many new people, including Ramon Olivares to head up our Latin America business development, and Jeff Papalia as our vice president just in 2020. We have also added to our customer service and sales teams a few times this year. We are currently undertaking many new projects internally to support our growth these new team members will bring with the implementation of new systems and investments in our infrastructure.”

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?

“The U.S. textile market, in my opinion, must be one of the most patriotic supply chains around. As mentioned, we believe the USA can handle and should handle the PPE requirements of our hospitality sector. We have been through the turbulent times following the move overseas and are looking forward to doing our part in seeing it through so it comes back stronger than ever. I believe with the enormous amount of pride our supply chain has, that this is possible.”

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

“We have been SEAMS members going on eight or nine years. I was given the opportunity to really take the lead on behalf of MMI to participate in SEAMS events and am grateful for that. SEAMS, to me personally, has been responsible for most of the relationships I’ve made throughout my career. I always like to tell prospective members, ‘You can call a SEAMS member any time, any place, and they will take the time to answer whatever questions you may have.’ This is really the type of relationship SEAMS cultivates because we all value our supply chain and country so much. We all play a small role in bringing this market back and collectively the SEAMS membership plays a huge role in ensuring that. I really cannot say enough about what it means to MMI to be SEAMS members and if a company utilizes the networking SEAMS offers, they will too, find it very influential to their business.