



THE ASSOCIATION & VOICE OF THE US SEWN PRODUCTS INDUSTRY

**SEAMS' Member Spotlight:
Grand Forest, Inc.**

Note: Each edition of our newsletter, SEAMS features one of our esteemed members. In this edition of SEAMS Member Spotlight, Grand Forest, Inc. of Summerville, S.C., is featured. CEO Carrie Bovender responds to questions submitted by Devin Steele.

Year founded: 1985

Primary specialties: Manufacturer of safety apparel for chainsaw users

Employees numbers: 50 employees, all located in Summerville, S.C.

Markets served: Logging industry, arborists, tree care specialists, electric companies, roadside maintenance crews and homeowners who operate chainsaws

Company history and insights:

Grand Forest, Inc. is a company founded on the belief that loggers should be safe and well-equipped. Since 1985, the company has been passionate about reducing the risk chainsaw users encounter each time they start up the saw. Grand Forest manufactures technically advanced chainsaw protective apparel designed to safeguard the wearer's legs, arms and body while allowing freedom of movement and breathability. Its products are designed and manufactured in South Carolina, with raw materials sourced both domestically and globally while also prioritizing new, advanced and superior materials.

In addition to manufacturing, the company also imports and distributes two Swedish heritage brands: Gränsfors Bruk AB® hand forged axes and Woolpower Östersund® merino wool insulated garments. "While originally sister companies to Grand Forest, we are proud to continue distributing and representing these companies as they partner with our devotion towards sustainable products equipping our customers ethically, functionally and safely," Bovender said.

Why Grand Forest is a great place to work:

"Grand Forest has always been a family-owned company, and our current ownership has truly prioritized our family values by genuinely treating each employee with high respect and value," she added. "Every employee is vital in making this company what it is today."

Manufacturing or other processes handled in its production facility:

Grand Forest is a cut-and-sew operation with an emphasis on technical materials and cut protection. The company is able to fully complete garments in-house, from design to distribution. Its capabilities include design, patternmaking, digitizing, automated spreading, multi-ply automated cutting, heat setting, embroidery, sewing, inspection, packaging and shipping.

Breakdown of local production vs. global sourcing:

"We are also a distributor of high end Swedish made products; Woolpower merino wool insulated garments and Gränsfors Bruk hand forged axes," Bovender said. "These two heritage brands have been in our portfolio for over 20 years and were previously sister companies to Grand Forest. As the



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U.S. distributor we have great respect for their family-owned philosophy and dedication to quality, which mimics our own company culture. These products represent approximately 20% of our revenue.

“We also import and supply items to complement our chainsaw protective chaps with protective mitts, boots, helmet systems, and hearing protection,” she continued. “These items are sourced both in the U.S. and globally to outfit our users with the most up-to-date technology. These products represent approximately 15% of our revenue.

“The majority of our employees and our revenue are engaged in the manufacturing arm of our company – approximately 65% based on revenue,” she added.

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

“We have continued to manufacture our products in the U.S. since inception in 1985. By being versatile and adaptable, we have been able to maintain our company focus and continue to grow. We have the ability to have quick turnarounds and custom manufacturing as needed. Our focus has always been to continue manufacturing in the U.S. It is important for our economy and for our customers to have product made here, under excellent working conditions.”

Thoughts on the made-in-America movement and what is the company’s ongoing strategy to produce or source in this country:

“It is exciting to see some of our suppliers start to come back to the U.S. and begin manufacturing here again. Sourcing in the U.S. is the key to having a true U.S. supply stream to our customers.”

Biggest challenge of manufacturing to the USA:

“The biggest challenge we have with manufacturing in the U.S. is the increasing cost of labor,” Bovender said. “It is important to offer a strong living wage to our employees, along with benefits and a positive work environment.”

How the COVID-19 crisis affected business:

“Grand Forest has been able to continue operations during the COVID-19 instability,” she said. “Although protocols have changed and our manufacturing process had to adapt to include additional spacing and cleaning, we were able to continue manufacturing at optimal capacity. Our current product mix was in high demand and our customers were still in need of chainsaw PPE products. In addition, we were able to fulfill some additional needs in our community by manufacturing masks for the military.”

Business outlook for the foreseeable future:

“With this being a very unstable year, we still feel that growth in American manufacturing is continuing and Grand Forest is at the forefront in our industry,” Bovender said.

The value of SEAMS’ membership:

“We have been a member of SEAMS for over 20 years, with a brief break in membership when we had financial hardship,” she said. “We quickly returned because we know the value SEAMS brings to our organization. The knowledge that the unified group brings to our organization is essential in all areas such as sourcing, HR, security and industry advancements.”