



THE ASSOCIATION & VOICE OF THE US SEWN PRODUCTS INDUSTRY

**SEAMS' Millennial Corner – April 2021**

## **Reflections: Pandemic has brought opportunities to grow, learn, teach**

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As we sit here more than a full year into the pandemic, there is a lot to reflect upon, and a lot to look forward to as we embark on the future for the textiles and manufacturing industry.

As an industry, we've been called into action on the PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) front, and everyone has collectively come together, collaborated with one another, shared resources and information, and rose to the occasion, probably for the first time since WWII (and I'm much too young to know from experience). It makes me immensely proud to be part of this industry and of my colleagues, and I hope that we will continue to work together to secure this PPE business from both the government and from private sector healthcare.

In the second half of 2020 and continuing into 2021, there have been [a record number of new small businesses started](#), and many are in the apparel and sewn products space. My inquiry box has been consistently full, and I know from speaking with some of you, that you've also been very busy, to the point where you're at or near capacity for months ahead. It's an amazing feeling to be here, especially during such uncertain times.

My hope is that we don't turn our backs on those growing numbers of small businesses and entrepreneurs who would love to keep their products Made in America, too. We need to make it easier for them to work with us, and as they grow, to continue to work with us vs. moving their orders overseas. Direct-to-consumer brands are driving change and are increasingly relying on just-in-time lean manufacturing, and producing on-demand – [Forbes](#) reports that brands are “shifting from Design-Make-Sell to Design-Sell-Make.”

Looking back to the [On-Demand Manufacturing presentation](#) put on by Lectra at the 2019 Fall Conference, microfactories (or implementing specialized teams or sewing cells within a larger factory) is where we are headed. Just ask our other SEAMS members: [Tukatech](#) or [Gerber](#). I'm sure there are more. Let's work together on this.

I've also had the unique opportunity this past year to work with the next generation on the scene – the same one who makes fun of my skinny jeans and side-parted hair. Contrary to popular belief and media portrayal, Millennials are no longer the “young” group the older generations like to complain about going on Spring Break (among other things) – it's Gen Z. This past fall I started a part-time teaching position at Columbia College Chicago, and have enjoyed getting to know what these senior-level students are interested in and what they seek as they look for employment - entering into the workforce in a crazy year notwithstanding. They're seeking support and flexibility just like Millennials, and are more open than ever to collaborative team environments. I've long been an advocate for mentoring, teaching and



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passing along skills. I urge all of you to carve out some time to speak to a class, take on an apprentice or figure out another way to bring in a young person into your organization.

This year has made it easier for us all to attend conferences and events virtually. Where I may not have had the time or ability to take a trip, I now had easy access to see speakers around the country and world. In my business as a pattern maker, I always prefer an in-person meeting or fit session over a virtual one, and have worked remotely with clients for years. Still, this year I have strengthened my ability to conduct fit sessions remotely as I'm using the software more and more.

I think that Zoom and the like will be here to stay and make it easier and more inclusive for people to attend events – but I know my students, like myself, have Zoom fatigue and are all anxious to return to in-person classes, events and conferences. I'm sure I'm not alone here. I miss the side conversations you might have before or after a presentation, connecting with someone as you refill your coffee or grab a drink at the bar. Even those "sneak-attack" moments where you just stand near someone you want to meet until there's a lull in the conversation where you can insert and introduce yourself. That stuff doesn't happen via Zoom, but it's an important part of networking. Yes, I know that sounded weird. But I know you know what I'm talking about, and you've all done it too!

In addition to surviving the pandemic, running my business and teaching at the college level, I've teetered on complete insanity managing e-learning for my daughter in kindergarten. Shoutout to ALL the parents out there who survived this year. Let's have a toast to one another at the SEAMS Conference this fall.

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