



THE ASSOCIATION & VOICE OF THE US SEWN PRODUCTS INDUSTRY

Member Spotlight: America Knits

Note: Each edition of our newsletter, SEAMS features one of our esteemed members. In this edition of SEAMS Member Spotlight, America Knits of Swainsboro, Ga., is highlighted. President Steve Hawkins, who cofounded the company with childhood best friend Dr. David Talton, a cardiothoracic surgeon practicing in Tupelo, Miss., was interviewed for the piece.

Year founded: 2019

Primary specialties: Develops unique sustainable supply chains to manufacture premium quality T-shirts, other apparel and now medical scrubs.

Number of employees: 77, all based in Swainsboro, Ga.

Markets served: USA only for now but “looking at other international opportunities.”

Company history and insights:

“David and I have been best friends since kindergarten. We have always trusted each other, so we’ve always talked about going into business together. In 2019, he started making some trips with me to textile events like SEAMS and fell in love with the business. He has always enjoyed making things, so the business piqued his interest. I was introduced to Swainsboro by an equipment dealer and, ironically, it was the halfway point for both of us – exactly seven hours from Tupelo and seven hours from Parkland, Fla., so we met there several times and conducted job fairs on Saturdays. The response was incredible, with over 150 applications accepted. I knew the demand for USA-made goods was there, I just had no idea where the right spot to build a plant might be. I also knew we needed to make it different. We did that with automated equipment, a clean and bright environment, and most of all, a very active social environment within the plant that would attract young people. We have been successful with it.”

Company differentiators:

“Good question – the difference is the ‘vibe’ within our factory. My wife, Alejandra, is a former airline employee, so her work history involves a lot of training and involving employees in the companies’ direction and opportunities, so she has been extremely helpful. We have been able to capture a lot of great media within the great state of Georgia, and the support has been incredible. Gov. (Brian) Kemp even highlighted America Knits in his 2021 State of the State speech and invited us to attend in person. It really is about the people.”

America Knits’ pivot into Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) during the pandemic:

“We pivoted after being included in a special task force headed by Andy Warlick, CEO of yarn spinner Parkdale. My longtime friendships with Parkdale executives Dan Morrison, Charles Heilig and Andy Long helped us to be included. We immediately spoke with customers, and all agreed to allow us to pause production to participate on our country’s need. We needed different types of machines, so we went out and got them. (Fellow SEAMS’ member) Brother International even contacted us after seeing a story and donated 10 automatic machines, which I will always remember.”



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Biggest challenges and lessons learned during the COVID-19 crisis:

“The biggest lessons were the sheer uncertainty of trying to protect ourselves and our employees on a daily basis. I think the biggest lesson was in business – just like in personal decisions, it is always a good decision when you do the right thing without hesitation.”

Beyond the pandemic, how America Knits has adapted in its first couple of years in business to remain competitive:

“The best way is our unique supply chains, which feature collaborations with cotton growers, spinners and other textile producers to be innovative, not only with our story, but also with the products having great fits and unique attributes.”

Thoughts on the Made-in-America movement and company’s strategy to remain competitive here:

“It is a hard question, but we had one senator and three congressmen visit our plant recently to celebrate our Georgia-made and Georgia-grown 100 percent cotton scrub announcement to partner with Rhino Medical, which tells me that Made in America and the jobs being reshored are important to our policymakers, which can help us. [America Knits is part of a [Field to Closet initiative](#) to make American-grown-and-made 100 percent cotton medical scrubs.] The plants must be different, though, than they have been historically.”

Biggest challenges and opportunities for manufacturing in the USA as well as this hemisphere:

“I think the communist countries being able to sell any product and compete with U.S. manufacturers speaks against what the USA stands for and the principles in which it was founded. The government sold out the American worker many years ago, and it is going to take some strong decisions to reverse. Our factory can find niches, but we really want to see fundamental changes in our trade policies at the federal level. Nike saying this week that they are a ‘China brand’ was pretty eye opening.”

Outlook for the company for the foreseeable future:

“We are extremely optimistic, with several projects moving along rapidly.”

Value of SEAMS’ membership:

“SEAMS has been awesome. The first event in Savannah, Ga., was like a family reunion for me. Everyone was so welcoming, and David fit right in as well. The truth is that we have been so busy since we started, marketing or looking for work has been the least challenging. Training and hiring operators as well as training everyone, including middle management, has been our opportunity and we are getting there.”