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## **SEAMS members excited, cautiously optimistic as in-person events return**

By Devin Steele

SEAMS' members have been active in the last few weeks as in-person trade shows – many of which were postponed over the last 18 months – have been taking place.

From the Home Furnishings Expo in Hickory, NC, to Sourcing At MAGIC in Las Vegas to Outdoor Retailer in Denver to this week's Techtextil North America show in Raleigh, NC – several members have exhibited their products and services at these events. With the coronavirus still around, and recent COVID spikes, these shows are different in many ways from those that occurred pre-pandemic. But after months of virtual meetings, conferences, tradeshow, etc., these members have been anxious to return to in-person gatherings and see customers, suppliers and potential clients face to face – safety measures in place, of course.

Following are reviews of what some SEAMS' members who chose to participate have experienced at these events as the industry reopens.

### **AATCC**

At TTNA this week, AATCC featured dimensional stability tools, impact testing equipment, color evaluation tools and a standards manual.

The association also made presentations at "The Academy" each day. This year, AATCC is celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and staff shared information about its Week of Celebration in November. Featured during that week will be AATCC Committee Meetings and its inaugural Textile Discovery Summit, plus special 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary events.

"We are happy to be back to in-person events," said Maria Thiry, Communications & Membership Director. "Virtual events or hybrid events are here to stay, but they certainly won't replace in-person events. While virtual events are great, and certainly helpful when in-person events are difficult or impossible to attend, there's nothing like being able to see people in person. Virtual events are good for purposeful connections, but in-person events add the element of serendipity – someone you run into who you didn't realize would be a good connection turns out to be a valuable business connection."

AATCC sent many of its staff members to the Raleigh show due to the close proximity of its Technical Center in Research Triangle Park, NC, she said. Representatives took all safety related precautions, she noted, adding that the association has developed some specific COVID-related materials, including a face-covering standard, and [free COVID-related resources](#) for the industry.

"The Techtextil North America show has been a great success, and we are certainly hoping that AATCC's Textile Discovery Summit will be a success this November," Thiry said.



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## **Apex Mills**

Along with having the opportunity to speak with customers and prospects about projects they're working on, Apex Mills of Inwood, NY, showed its wide-format fabrics that are perfect for projection screens, shading and other outdoor purposes during this week's Techtextil North America trade show.

The company partners with customers to identify their needs and construct a textile that meets the specifications of their application. Live events such as TTNA enable Apex to navigate the process quickly and engineer a tailored solution, according to Stephanie Rodgers, senior director of R&D, Innovation Textiles, who was among several reps on hand in Raleigh.

"Our team thrives when attending in-person events," she said. "Connecting with people and building relationships is the heart of sales. Although virtual events fill a gap, they are not a replacement for the benefits of speaking and interacting with people face to face."

Rodgers added that engaging with customers in person can speed the sales cycle and learning curve. "There are times when a buyer thinks they need one type of fabric and, through conversation, find out a different fabric would achieve better results," she said. "These are the conversations that foster that 'trusted partner' relationship."

## **Contempora Fabrics**

Contempora Fabrics, an employee-owned circular knit company based in Lumberton, NC, attended both Sourcing at MAGIC in Las Vegas and Techtextil North America in Raleigh, NC, this month.

"It feels really good to be back at trade shows," said President Ron Roach during TTNA. "MAGIC was OK, but I don't think it was very well attended, so I'm not sure if it was a good show for us. But this show, if nothing else, reconnecting with the entire industry has been fantastic. We've seen so many people who we haven't seen in two years, whether it's suppliers of ours or other parts of the supply chain. That's been really important for us. Our booth has been very busy, very active."

Contempora Fabrics, which at full capacity is capable of producing more than 2 million pounds of fabric per month on more than 200 circular machines, featured most of its fabrics plus its new electronic eyelet Jacquard fabrics knitted on a machine that Monarch Knitting specialty built for the company.

"It's meant to accent our team sport business with some fancier items that can be used as inserts," Roach said. "It's been very well received. This is the only machine like this in this hemisphere."

The company, which transitioned into fabrics for various PPE items as the pandemic began to spread, has resumed production of most of its typical lines but is still "dabbling" in Level 1 gowns, he added. On display in the booth was a mini waterfall demonstrating the effectiveness of Durable Water Repellent (DWR) fabrics that have been tested to withstand 100+ washes.

"As far as making masks, that kind of stopped a little over a year ago," Roach said. "We're sitting on a lot of inventory, but we've sold a lot of masks in the last seven days."



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### **Datatex**

Milan-based Datatex, with U.S. operations in Alpharetta, GA, highlighted its Now Sales App this week at Techtextil North America – its first show since COVID began its global spread.

“It’s a tablet-based app for your sales team to go out and meet with their customers,” said Shannon McCarthy, Vice President of Operations and Business Development. “They can show a dashboard of order history, or pull up invoices or shipping bills and those kinds of things, but they can also take orders.”

Datatex is one of the world’s leading suppliers of IT software solutions for the global textile and apparel Industry with the largest install base of textile software, and customers in 45 countries and on five continents.

“I have been pleased with the show,” McCarthy said. “We’ve had some good quality visitors and the quantity is even bigger than what I had anticipated, so I’m very pleased.”

McCarthy added that he is planning to attend SEAMS’ Annual Networking Conference next month.

### **Eastex Products**

Eastex Products, which moved into a new, much-larger headquarters in Plymouth, MA, earlier this year, exhibited this week for the first time since the pandemic struck.

At TTNA, the company, which specializes in textile components, custom solutions and now PPE, highlighted its breathable laminates, cast-coated fabrics, display loop, nylon/polyester fabric, slip-not-grip fabrics, spacer fabrics, vinyl fabrics, weldable fabric, wide-loop fabrics, hook and loop, laminates, neoprene sheeting, “no-see-um” netting, Spandex, phase change material and webbing.

“It’s great to be back at it,” said company President Eric Hill. “I wish we had a little more traffic, but I’m sure it’s going to pick up as things move along in the coming weeks and months. We had a good first and second day. It has been well worth the time and effort to be here.”

The company is planning to have personnel walking the IFAI Expo in November in Nashville.

### **Gehring Tricot Corp.**

Gehring Tricot Corp., Dolgeville, NY, exhibited at Outdoor Retailer this month and was planning to show at TTNA, but the company decided not to fly as Tropical Storm Henri was hitting the Northeast U.S. two days before the event started.

At OR, the company, which designs and manufactures warp knits, circular knits, and stretch woven fabrics for medicine, sports, safety, aerospace, apparel and the military, highlighted its highly engineered circular knits, warp knits, wovens, stretch wovens, spacer fabrics, etc. Its fabrics are featured in firefighting apparel, a lot of different sports – including in the NBA and NFL – the safety



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industry, ballistics, (sole-sourced) military fabrics, lamination, impact resistance and other technical markets.

“All of our salespeople were pretty excited about getting back to visiting people face to face instead of by video calls and emails,” said President & CEO Skip Gehring. “I was actually surprised at how busy the Outdoor Retailer show was. So everybody was excited about going back out and traveling again.”

Gehring added that reservations still exist related to COVID and its spread, but “we are still going to have to learn how to operate in a world with this virus.”

As a fabric supplier, in-person events are necessary from a tangibility and efficiency perspective, Gehring noted.

“Face-to-face gatherings for a company like us – where we make fabrics based on customers’ requirements and what will be the fabrics of the future for our customers in terms of their end products – absolutely allows much more detailed meetings and discussions regarding requirements and test results. Face to face is more ideal than trying to figure those things out over the phone, or through video calls or email. So, it allows for more in-depth conversations.”

### **Henderson Machinery Co.**

Henderson Machinery Co., exhibited at TTNA this week and reported a decent show.

“Day one got off to a slow start, but it picked up, and we were able to reconnect with members in the industry,” said Sean Burke, Director of Business Development. “We learned that some folks’ titles had changed and about others who had left some organizations but have stayed in the textile industry, which is always a plus. Day two started off strong but slowly fizzled by lunchtime, but there was still plenty of foot traffic and discussions of current and future production needs.”

Henderson Machinery Inc. displayed the Agteks DirecTwist yarn twisting machine manufactured by one of several of its international principals. The company demonstrated different twisting operations with wire, Kevlar and polyester yarns. The company gave away branded socks knitted at its Greensboro NC showroom that have a silicone-free/latex-free gripper tape in the back heel made by Faitplast. This tape is used throughout the hosiery, athletic apparel and medical textile field, and having physical samples to share with to visitors may open some doors for further discussions, Burke said.

Face-to-face events lead to a more focused dialogue into what manufacturers are doing, what they want to achieve, and how to better understand their bottlenecks, he added. “It is very easy to get distracted during virtual events and not have that conversational exchange going on,” he said.

While SEAMS’ Executive Director Will Duncan was speaking during SPESA’s Advancements Conference on Day two, Burke and Tanya Wade of the Manufacturing Solutions Center (MSC) covered the SEAMS’ booth and were able to “drum up excitement for the Annual Networking Conference in



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September and discuss the advantages of SEAMS for brands, manufacturers and suppliers,” Burke said.

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

At TTNA this week, Andalusia, AL.-based Henderson Sewing Machine Co. exhibited a digitally controlled, ultrasonic joining machine; a hot air tape attaching machine; and a cylinder-arm, programmable pattern sewer.

“We are pleased to be able to attend in-person industry events again,” said CEO Frank Henderson. “Customers are seeking information about new, innovative products to address their changing markets, address workforce issues and determine their best path forward to a digitally connected factory floor.”

Henderson noted that the company reduced the number of booth personnel this year due to the lingering Delta variant, but has opted to participate in four regional trade expos in four different industry sectors to exhibit its products during the balance of the year.

“We, as most companies, are concerned with the possible spread of the virus,” Henderson said. “However, we are taking all the precautions we can to continuously disinfect our facilities, promote social distancing, encourage our staff to get vaccinated, wear masks if the individual chooses and follow the ‘ever-changing’ CDC guidelines. Ultimately, I believe that business and life must go on!”

During the last 18 to 20 months, Henderson Sewing Machine participated in several virtual trade show events and found it difficult to engage customers and develop the personal business relationships that usually come with in-person events, he added. “Virtual Events are effective as an educational venue, where the presenters are delivering targeted educational content,” he said.

### **Jason Mills LLC**

Jason Mills, a Milltown, NJ-based complete sourcing, manufacturing, warehousing and distribution partner for all mesh, fabrics, and industrial textile manufacturing needs, reported an outstanding Techtextil North America this week.

“We thought that if we came out with 30 new contacts, our expectations would be exceeded,” said Brenda Stambouljian, Director of Sales & Marketing. “At the end of the first day alone, we surpassed that number. I wouldn’t say our expectations were low, they were just ‘wait and see.’ We didn’t know what to expect, but for us, we thought 10 new contacts per day would be good.”

Company President Michael Lavroff added an anecdotal story during the show: “I was having breakfast today, and seated next to me were two guys from one of our largest accounts,” he said. “I had never met them before, but I could see their company logo on their shirts, and I struck up a conversation. Two hours later, they’re at the booth going through additional styles, and we now have a whole new development project. So it’s just that kind of synergy happens only when you show up and are in person.”



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Jason Mills displayed its full line of industrial knit mesh materials. The company has added a few new styles, such as its 1996SD (archery netting) and blackout materials. These styles complete its impact screen/simulator line. The company has also added style 1905, which is loadbearing to 1,000 pounds and is fire resistant, to its healthcare line.

In addition to Stambouljian and Lavroff, Robert Neuschaefer, Production Coordinator & Sales Associate, attended the show.

### **Minnesota Knitting Mills**

Minnesota Knitting Mills (MKM), Mendota Heights, MN, exhibited at Sourcing at MAGIC in Las Vegas this month and showcased various styles of headwear fabrics, including eco-materials; flame-resistant fabrics; and other specialty fabrics.

“It felt a little strange to be back to in-person events, but it was exciting,” said Britt Moore, Director of Sales & Customer Services. “Everyone seems to feel that way, so interactions can be somewhat awkward. But attendees have been so excited to get out and attend shows that this awkwardness is easily overcome. For a company like MKM, face-to-face events is always better because visitors are able to touch and feel the quality of our products.”

Staff wore masks and limited contact at the show, and the company’s concern is “low overall,” he said. “Most attendees were taking similar steps and had similar thoughts on the pandemic.”

MKM also sent Plant Manager Wade Kytola to walk the floor at TTNA this week.

### **MMI Textiles**

MMI Textiles, Westlake, OH, exhibited at two trade shows this month – Outdoor Retailer (OR) in Denver and TTNA in Raleigh – showcasing at both its EcoThriv line, as well as its stretch wovens, along with other lines.

“It feels AWESOME to be back to in-person events again,” said Amy Bircher, company Founder & President. “We were a little nervous about potential changes in our future with mask mandates going up in certain places and states.”

At OR, MMI Textiles downsized its booth personnel when it learned how small the show was expected to be, she said. The company also had the same-size booth and number of personnel at TTNA.

“We had a great day at Outdoor Retailer (on Day 1),” Bircher said. The show was very small, but our meetings were very productive, and we had record number of leads.”

As for TTNA, traffic was better than expected, and interest was great in MMI’s product lines, according to Joey Smith, Director of Business Development.



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## Zünd America

Techtextil North America this week was Swiss digital cutting systems provider Zünd's fourth trade show in seven weeks. The company also exhibited at the Furniture Manufacturing Expo in Hickory, NC, SuperCorrExpo in Orlando, FL, and Foam Expo North America in Novi, MI – and is scheduled to attend 11 more trade shows or conferences this year, including SEAMS' Annual Networking Conference next month.

“At these shows, we’re not seeing the quantity of people that we’re used to, but the quality is still there,” said Bill Richards, Sales Director. “The biggest difference we’re seeing is companies aren’t sending eight, 10 or 12 people, they’re sending two or three. So you’re getting smaller numbers but good people, and they go back to their companies and disseminate the information.”

Added Andy Arkin, Southeast Regional Sales Manager, Industrial Segments: “It’s good to have people in the booth, and we’re happy to see everyone again. We love doing shows.”

Zünd digital cutters are industry-leading cutting solutions for textiles, composites, foam and many other industrial applications. Unmatched in versatility and modularity, Zünd systems are completely customizable, with specialized tooling and application-specific workflow automation, Richards said.

New on display at TTNA this year was the Zünd Cradle Feeder 100 with integrated cut-off system, intelligent controls and smart roll-off feature that makes textile cutting with Zünd equipment easier and more productive than ever, according to Arkin.

“While it felt like we had pretty much gone back to normal for the first few events – which was a real thrill! – there have been troubling signs that things are taking a turn for the worse again and the thrill may have been short lived,” said Beatrice Drury, Marketing Manager.

With the shutdown in 2020 and the necessity to connect online with customers, Zünd America has put a lot of effort into developing live-streaming and broadcasting capabilities, Drury added.

“This has been incredibly helpful, and in many instances a great substitute for in-person contact, especially for such things as machine demonstrations tailored to specific applications and tooling/processing methods, operator training/re-training and other scenarios that demand a focus on very specific customer needs,” she said. “Our investment in expanded virtual capabilities created a lot of business opportunities that helped us weather the pandemic-induced slowdowns in certain sectors of the economy.

“On the other hand,” she continued, “when it comes to new lead generation, one virtual event after another proved that nothing beats face-to-face contact and the real, tangible experience of seeing and hearing the equipment perform right in front of prospective buyers while engaging one on one with our sales staff. Going forward, we intend to make the most of both worlds, by adding virtual components to most of our in-person events. This will allow us to reduce tradeshow costs by limiting the complexity of our exhibits and using our live-stream capabilities to demonstrate anything we may not have readily



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available on the show floor, making our in-person events even more personal and engaging than before the pandemic disruptions.”

For the most part, Zünd has been sending the same number of staff as it did pre-pandemic. This is mostly due to its booth staff size being primarily dependent on the complexity of its exhibit, the size the show and anticipated density of traffic.

“Even if we wanted to, cutting back on staff is difficult since we need a certain number of personnel such as technicians to set up and run the equipment, as well as application specialists, marketing and sales personnel to ensure the Zünd brand is properly represented,” Drury said.