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## Champion Thread open state-of-the-art, eco-friendly dyehouse

By Devin Steele

GASTONIA, NC – SEAMS' member Champion Thread Company®, a manufacturer and developer of premium sewing threads, engineered yarns and accessories for textile and sewn products manufacturers since 1979, recently opened a state-of-the-art, eco-friendly dyehouse a few miles south of its headquarters here.

Now operational, the facility, located in SC, features state-of-the-art package dyeing units, with plans to add more equipment in the future, according to President Matt Poovey. The family-owned and operated company enhanced its dyeing capability in order to have better control of its products and better service its customers.

The new facility is one of only a few such dyehouses built in the USA in a generation. The new facility enables CTC to quickly, efficiently, and locally dye its yarns and threads to speed deliveries, expand scheduling flexibility, reduce costs and ensure color accuracy.

"The majority of our business is made to order," Poovey said. We quickly turn small lots, and you have to be lean and flexible to do that. We opened this facility because there was a huge hole in the marketplace for a lean, nimble company like ours to service a sector of the business that was historically disregarded. It allows us to control our supply chain with higher quality, faster turns. And it all goes back to lean, flexible manufacturing."

Making the decision to build a greenfield dyehouse was a strategic, well-planned, customer-focused move the company made during COVID, he said. The company wouldn't settle for just any equipment, however – only the latest and most modern. The result: the equipment uses less energy and water, dyes consistently and is faster and more productive than older equipment. And the boiler systems are "as efficient as anything you'll find in the world. We also use sophisticated heat reclamation systems," he said. This further points to Champion's decision to be as efficient and ecofriendly as possible, he added.

"So the latitude and the flexibility of that facility is what gives us a speed-to-market advantage," he said.

In addition, the accompanying modern dye lab is streamlined, utilizes cutting-edge technologies and uses significantly lower energy resources and utilities, said Jim Lee, Vice President of Sales.

"These added capabilities give us the ability to service customers more responsibly, and allows us the flexibility to expedite things, compress lead times and improve our service levels," he added.

Grant Spangler, Director of Manufacturing, called it "controlling your own destiny. This new investment and facility gives us better control of our products and flexibility as well as speed to market."

With flexibility driving the decision to invest in a new dyeing facility, Champion Thread leaders didn't make the move for added capacity, but to improve customer service, Poovey said.



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“We don't look to churn out a huge number of pounds – we look to produce the right pound at the right time,” he said. “What does the customer need and when do they need it? We have a fully cross-functionally trained workforce with more capacity than we need, so that when these made-to-order or development opportunities come, there are always available machines to make the product that is in demand. We just had more new equipment arrive two weeks ago to our Gastonia facility. Do we need that equipment for the amount of business we have? Probably not. But to keep our flexibility and Just In Time process, that's our model.”

## **Commitment to automation, R&D**

Champion Thread was founded by CEO Bob Poovey in 1979. Champion's commitment to automation and product development has been crucial to its success for 44 years. Innovative R&D is the main growth driver to meet and exceed customer expectations.

The company started as an industrial thread distributor, then manufacturer, and moved into engineered/specialty yarns and other products serving the apparel, agricultural, automotive, bedding, carpet, FR, furniture, home furnishings, medical, military, safety, personal protective equipment (PPE), wax cable and other sectors.

Bob Poovey, who studied textiles at NC State, calls himself a “practical engineer.” After college, he joined NASA during its heyday of moon launches, the Saturn V era. The son of a Burlington Industries manager, he grew up in textiles and eventually found his way to the industry after spending time at a handful of sewing thread-related companies. He learned thread manufacturing – and dyeing – along the way and decided to launch Champion Thread with the knowledge he had gained.

Bob Poovey, who turned 81 in January, still works five days a week and remains deeply embedded in the business. He said he learned early on in his career where the heart and soul of R&D lies: “The best idea people in the world are the mechanics and operators on the floor,” he said. “When you get on the floor and talk to these folks and get your hands dirty, you can see firsthand what the issues are, instead of sitting in the office and wondering what's going on. The vast majority of my travels had nothing to do with sales. It was all about going and learning, then designing and building products or altering a current product.”

He iterated that installing the latest and best equipment and implementing automated machinery has been important.

Bob Poovey managed the dyehouse project, which his son said is “nice little cherry on top of a long, 60-year career.”

## **Customer focused remains**

Being customer focused has allowed the company to create a niche business model that has led to its exponential growth, Matt Poovey said.



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“With newer technology and speed to market, that is how you win the customer,” he said. “Being lean, when you call our company, there's a chance I might answer the phone, or Jim might answer the phone. If you have an emergency, we can go literally walk directly to the dye machine and put a lot in and you can have it in two days, for instance. That's an advantage that no one in our industry has.”

“Our customers aren't numbers to us,” he continued. “We work to know all our customers and understand their needs. We strive to engineer solutions tailored to a customer. When a customer calls, we can certainly take an order, but we like to dig one level deeper because we're subject matter experts. Do you need a special package? Do you need a special yarn? And that's where we really thrive. It's all about tailored solutions.”

Noting that it's a cliché, Matt Poovey said there's no “i” in “team,” pointing out that the leadership team capitalizes on each other's strengths to work in harmony.

“You're always as good as the people around you,” he said. “I'm not a micromanager by any stretch, and these professionals are very strong and confident in what they do. I really learned that from my Dad. Jim clearly knows what he is doing – he's tenacious and focused on our customers' needs. Grant knows what he's doing after 26 years in manufacturing. And there's a bit of entrepreneurial spirit in our company in that you drive your own division. Jim runs sales, Grant runs manufacturing. I take care of some other spots, as does our CFO. And product development is my Dad's strength. He excelled as an entrepreneurial businessman, but he's an engineer at heart.”

He added: “And that's how the company was built through the years, by saying ‘we can do this, but we can do this better,’ at every turn. That's how our manufacturing has really grown. And we've kept layering pieces with support from all of us and our employees. That's our company. It's a team.”