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SEAMS Gatherings: More Than A Feeling

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Nearly two months have already passed since SEAMS' Spring Conference, and I've been so busy I've hardly had a chance to fully reflect. However, I was glad to catch up with colleagues and meet a few new faces. In the weeks following, I had some great follow-up calls and virtual meets.

Now five years into my SEAMS journey, I've loved getting to know longtime members at events and tapping into their expertise and listening to their stories. I really love the introductions session – getting to hear what's new with those I know, and making notes for who I need to meet this time around. The influx of new faces and growing diversity of attendees gets me excited. In the last year, the organization has gained several new members and many first-time attendees. I spoke with a few of them to better understand their motivations and goals and what brought them to SEAMS.

The conference kicked off strongly with keynote speaker Cindy DiPietrantonio, who shared her story working with Boathouse Sports, and how she revitalized a legacy brand, maintaining high standards for quality and design, and remained steadfast in a commitment to producing in their own factory based in Philadelphia. She spoke about introducing premium sweatshirts and jackets in an era where we compete against fast fashion, pushing hard against the narrative that Americans only want cheap clothes. Everyone was inspired by the stories she proudly shared, including those of Tom Brady and Jason Kelce, and their appreciation for the brand.

Brent Mahaffey (Pleneri) was impressed with her tenacity and grit:

“Her stories and passion for the industry were not only presented in an entertaining way but also incredibly motivating. Cindy’s insights demonstrated that with hard work and a focus in the right areas, the apparel manufacturing industry can not only survive, but thrive. Her enthusiasm and dedication to the industry left a lasting impression and inspired us to continue striving for excellence in our own business.”

I loved hearing about how Cindy overcame hardships in business, and I found myself very motivated by her STEPS acronym, along with others around me who were taking copious notes.

The landscape we are dealing with as a domestic supply chain is challenging to say the least, and I think this was the motivational story we all needed to hear. It wasn't all rosy, there were challenges to overcome, and the power of a good network came up.



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Not surprisingly, that's precisely what members are seeking out with SEAMS. I asked what motivated some of these newer members to attend and join the organization.

"SEAMS provides us with opportunities to meet and collaborate with a broad range of potential partners and to stay in touch with what is going on in our markets and with our customers and suppliers. We are proud of the recognition and relationships that we have built to date as a Chicago-based cut and sew manufacturer, [and are] always seeking to build new relationships [to] achieve those objectives all over the U.S."

- **William Slewa** ([Top Notch Sewing Solutions](#))

"Joining SEAMS allows us to quickly gain vital connections, ensuring we know exactly who to contact when we need specific resources or assistance. Additionally, SEAMS provides a platform for us to introduce our business to others in the industry, helping us [to] establish our presence and grow our reputation."

- **Brent Mahaffey** ([Pleneri](#))

One of the benefits I often call upon when asked about SEAMS is the industry relationships that are formed during these conferences. It makes a huge impact on what you gain to spend a few days together as a group and have candid conversations. From every level of business and industry experience, the organization and members are extremely welcoming and willing to help each other. This is especially evident from the perspective of our new entrepreneur members:

"I'm just beginning [as] an apparel brand and there is so much that I don't know. Every connection that I've talked to has helped me or steered me in the direction of help. Joining a group with a shared vision is powerful."

- **Douglas Lorenz** ([PalmTee](#))

"Truth be told, I have found value in every connection so far through SEAMS. Not once has anyone told me I should be doing this or that. What has been most beneficial is getting different perspectives from everyone in their niche of the industry. I came into this world completely ignorant, and every bit of information has helped."

- **Hank Schofield** ([Hank's Hard Goods](#))

Hank is a second-time attendee, and this time around took the opportunity to showcase his products, and his progress, at the table displays. He shared his concerns about industry issues past and present, and how that has impacted him as an entrepreneur. *"This was a driving factor for me going in on HHG, making high-quality stuff in the United States and responsibly."*

Like myself, Schofield stumbled upon SEAMS organically, first introduced through a trade show he attended. *"At the time I was only looking for thread manufactured in the United States, when I ran into Champion Thread Company at a trade show. They recommended I check*

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SEAMS out. It was a no brainer. I might as well have been stumbling around in the dark [before], and now I have quick access to just about anyone or anything I could think of."

He continued by sharing that the highlight of his experience this Spring was "probably the positive response we received from so many people [whom] we engaged with to tell our story. It was very encouraging."

Slewa added: "We have met with many like-minded professionals in the industry who recognize the strategic value, economic value and critical importance of U.S.-based suppliers like Top Notch that are able to streamline the process of designing and producing cut and sew products that may not lend themselves to offshore sourcing and finishing. We've been able to share our story, show our capabilities and demonstrate our value to customers of all sizes." He feels encouraged by the networking and conversations held with other attendees.

I think Brent Mahaffey nailed it when describing his experience:

"My biggest takeaway from this May's conference was witnessing how close-knit and supportive the industry is. Everyone is running their own businesses, [yet] it's clear that they are genuinely invested in the success and growth of the industry as a whole. This collective support among SEAMS members was immensely refreshing and encouraging. It reassured me that we are part of a community that values collaboration and mutual success."

Douglas Lorenz was impressed with "how passionate people are about the work they do, and how much they were willing to help me out."

Building up and growing a robust domestic supply chain and network is no doubt important to each of us. From both brand and manufacturing sides, I enjoyed learning what makes this vital to each company.

For Douglas this was a realization when outfitting himself for a golf outing: "I was going through my shirts and it just doesn't sit right with me that you can't find one made in the U.S."

Schofield is equally passionate, stating: "This is a hill I'll die on. I could probably write a book about this. Healthy industries across the board are absolutely critical for families, communities and ultimately national security. I'm trying to do my part with HHG and staying 100% domestic."

Slewa shared pride in how Top Notch is "part of the solution for organizations in our industry from the largest to some of the smaller, emerging companies; from a few pieces to long runs."

Mahaffey cited several reasons, from ensuring "higher quality control standards and faster response times," and how Pleneri "supports local economies and creates jobs within our communities. By investing in a U.S. supply chain, Pleneri aims to create a more sustainable,

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resilient, and ethically responsible business.” He continued, “The most impactful aspect of the SEAMS organization has been the opportunity to build a strong network and the openness of its members to provide advice and support. The willingness of established industry professionals to share their insights and experiences has been invaluable to us. SEAMS has created an environment where collaboration and mutual growth are prioritized, and the entire industry benefits from that.”

I enjoyed this sentiment from Schofield: *“More than any purchase order or business card that has come as a result from SEAMS, it’s just encouraging and refreshing to be around like-minded folks who are trying to survive in the same realm you are. I’ll always be grateful for that.”*

With that, I encourage you to invite a colleague to join us this September in Mobile, AL, for the opportunity to experience this feeling first hand. The schedule will be announced soon, and I’m really excited about our speaker lineup, the handshakes and hugs, the camaraderie and passion in the atmosphere.

Thank you to all who contributed!

Douglas Lorenz / PalmTee / palmtee.com

Hank Schofield / Hank’s Hard Goods / hankshardgoods.com

William Slewa / Top Notch Sewing Solutions / topnotchsewingsolutions.com

Brent Mahaffey / Pleneri / pleneri.com