



THE ASSOCIATION & VOICE OF THE US SEWN PRODUCTS INDUSTRY

Weaving the Future of SEAMS

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During our Spring Conference in Greensboro next week, SEAMS is proud to introduce its first women-focused group, WOVEN — Women Optimizing Vision, Excellence, and Networking. We have taken notice of the introduction and success of similar programming brought forth by industry colleagues and associations, and were inspired to take action.

This new group is being introduced at a time when SEAMS' Board of Directors includes more women than ever before in its 50+ year history. I'm so happy that the organization has elevated more women into leadership roles, and honored to be included in this cohort. This initiative is a dedicated response to creating intentional space for women's professional development.

The importance of this support is clear. Cara Gilevich, Senior Manager, Global Materials Research and Development at Workwear Outfitters, notes that in this male-centric industry, "the 'good ole boys club' really is a thing," and she is encouraged that the women on the SEAMS Board of Directors "bring some unique personality and talent to the table." The introduction of WOVEN provides a dedicated space that is vital for "relatable conversation and support."

The group's first event is a Walk and Talk held at the beginning of the conference, which is designed to be inclusive and accessible. Cara points out a critical need for this type of event: "There are always male dominant events at conferences — usually sports-centric... Not every female wants to play sports with the boys." The walk and talk format prioritizes networking, offering a slow, steady pace over a 2.5-mile trail to ensure attendees can comfortably navigate the beautiful trail, while still networking with ease.

This intentional approach also addresses the need to welcome younger generations and foster future leadership. Cara reflects on her first large industry event, the Bobbin Show nearly 30 years ago:

"I was so excited to attend such a large-scale industry focused event where I was a young female representing the company I worked for (Carhartt). I recall feeling a little intimidated at the caliber of people with textile education and experience, and myself still finishing a bachelor's degree in Fashion Merchandising. The one thing that I did not think much about until later in my career, is how male-centric these events were. I often was one of only a couple – if not the only – female in the group at cocktail hours,

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dinners etc. I was fortunate to always be treated with respect and grace in most of my event experiences. I have always been confident and adventurous, and therefore was able to attend many events as the solo individual from my organization without much thought. However, in hindsight, it took a special kind of personality and courage to do so."

Tabitha Green, Senior Sourcing Manager, TVF, has worked in the industry for over 15 years, noted that women-focused events foster an "openness and genuine connection" that makes it easier to "share challenges, successes, and career advice," which ultimately fostered mentorship and professional network building. She shared her earliest experience:

"Attending my first large industry conference was both exciting and overwhelming. I remember feeling inspired by the depth of knowledge in the room, but also a bit intimidated, especially being one of fewer women in many of the sessions. What stood out most was how valuable face-to-face conversations were. Those early networking moments helped me realize how supportive and collaborative the industry can be, and they played a big role in building my confidence and professional network."

I had a very similar experiences to Cara and Tabitha in my first few times attending Texprocess Americas and associated events, feeling a little out of my element coming into it without knowing anyone, and it became an easier experience when navigating a larger space when you had a friend or colleague around to find confidence together. As our industry and our events grow more diverse, I hope we can continue to both celebrate and support the newcomers who are vital to its long-term success.

Having attended women-focused events hosted by other industry associations, including the Women In Textiles Conference put on by ATA, I have found a deeper camaraderie with my female colleagues, deepening connections that became both a professional and personal support system. Tabitha agrees,

"These experiences were incredibly positive. There was a sense of openness and genuine connection that made it easier to share challenges, successes, and career advice. I found those spaces empowering, they fostered mentorship, encouraged honest dialogue, and helped reinforce that women's perspectives and leadership are essential to the growth of our industry."

Why is it important for SEAMS to foster these programs, in addition to those that currently exist? Accessibility, for sure. Cara concurs,

"It is often difficult for certain organizations to understand the value in women's events – and therefore will not approve time away from the daily grind, nor the cost to travel or attend such an event. When the event is baked into an already necessary conference,

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you cannot be turned down to attend! Women need women for relatable conversation and support!"

Tabitha is excited about how *"It creates a dedicated, intentional space for women within SEAMS to connect, learn, and elevate one another. It signals that the association recognizes the importance of supporting women's professional development and leadership. WOVEN has the potential to strengthen community and encourage mentorship."* She adds that,

"Participants can speak candidly, share experiences, and build confidence without pressure or hesitation. It allows for focused conversations around career growth, leadership, and navigating industry-specific challenges. By creating this space, SEAMS demonstrates a commitment to inclusivity and talent development, ultimately strengthening the industry as a whole through more diverse and empowered leadership."

I couldn't have said it better myself.

With that, I am excited to see the evolution of this group and where it will take each and every one of us, women and men alike.

"Contrary to popular belief, the best way to climb to the top of the ladder is to take others up there with you." - Maria Eitel, Founder and Chair of the Nike Foundation and The Girl Effect

See you in Greensboro,

– Xochil