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Taking Action: Finding Your People (and Your Karaoke Song) at SEAMS

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"I think there is something more important than believing: Action! The world is full of dreamers, there aren't enough who will move ahead and begin to take concrete steps to actualize their vision." — W. Clement Stone

I stumbled upon this quote earlier this week, in the midst of a chaotic time, and although it wasn't the first encounter with these words, they resonated strongly with me. In a time of chaos or uncertainty, the only way out is through action. Likewise, when we struggle and when we dream, we often turn to our friends and family. A SEAMS Conference feels just like a big family reunion. The education, business relationships and networking may attract you initially to check it out, but it's the genuine friendships and comradery that keep you coming back. Some of us may compete for the same customers – much like we vie for the attention of our favorite aunt or uncle – but we willingly and happily work together to solve problems, because we have a common goal: to ensure that the US Sewn Products and Textile industries thrive!

My first memorable conference experience with SEAMS was when I was asked to participate on the Millennial panel. I was one of 5 participants, and at the time, we were the youngest in the room. We discussed the challenges we faced as we learned and navigated the industry, and offered insight into how to better work together to push forward new ideas, collaborate, and grow. We represented a small fraction of the membership, and SEAMS has had other speakers discuss generational differences and opportunities as Gen Z entered the workforce and how we can continue to keep our industry exciting and relevant for generations to come.

Fellow Millennial Sean Burke, Director of Business Development, Henderson Machinery, also participated in this panel. I asked for his reflections on that experience -



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What do you remember most about participating in the SEAMS Millennial Panel in 2019?

Sean Burke: *"The overall understanding that the industry isn't going back to how it was in the 'glory days.' The massive volume of one or two products is gone, but the younger generation thrives on that constant change and creativity. Having multiple millennials in different parts of the supply chain saying that out loud, made some of the older generations reevaluate their business and management approach."*

What is your favorite SEAMS conference memory outside of the Millennial Panel? What made it memorable?

Sean Burke: *"SEAMS Spring 2026 conference in Greensboro North Carolina. It was a large group of us at dinner and there was a small side conversation of thread tensioning and in process quality control between, Kelli Kronberg (Clothier Design), Jeremy Wooten (Homtex), Jeoff Bodenhorst Jr. (LACorp), and myself. More people got involved in the conversation and it became apparent that some people never see the other parts of the supply chain before it gets to their facility. With the help of Jeoff and Jeremy we ended up convincing Clayton Martell (Clothier Design Source) to spend a few days in NC with me and tour some factories and meet some suppliers. SEAMS Fall 2024 in Mobile Alabama aka 'the hurricane party,' comes as a close 2nd. I believe that was the start of Ryan's dynasty of rained out golf events."*

How have SEAMS conferences helped you build relationships or become more connected to the industry?

Sean Burke: *"The atmosphere is completely different than a factory visit or sales call. We are all in the same boat trying to help each other out in being successful. I can not count the number of times I have been talking to some SEAMS members that have never been in contact before [realizing] that they can help each other out on some current projects. You get to learn what people are doing, what their true capabilities are, and see where the industry is trending."*



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What would you tell a younger industry professional attending a SEAMS conference for the first time?

Sean Burke: *"Talk to everyone, the industry is such a tight knit community, and they are willing to connect you with someone that they trust. We need younger active SEAMS members and it shows the rest of the industry that there is a bright future for domestic textiles."*

I asked some long-time members to dig into their memory banks - 20+ years: Frank Henderson, CEO, Henderson Sewing Machine Co; Ron Roach, President, Contempora Fabrics; Jim Hopkins, Director of Sales and Marketing, Hamrick Mills; and Jeoff Bodenhurst, President, LA Corp. Roach and Bodenhurst are also past SEAMS Presidents, and many have served on the Board of Directors during their memberships. Henderson, Hopkins, and Roach are past recipients of the Sarah Friedman Award, the most prestigious award given by SEAMS and in our industry, and I am honored to count myself among the awardees as well.

I remember sitting at a table which included speaker Rachel Slade, whom I was interviewing the following morning at the conference in Mobile, AL. As is tradition, the recipient of the award is described with their qualities first, before being revealed, and is always a surprise. I remember the warm feelings of support and recognition from my industry family, and feeling elated that my work and effort have garnered this high acknowledgement. Following my acceptance, we kicked off the "Hurricane After Party" with karaoke.

Approximately how long have you been attending SEAMS conferences, and what do you remember about your first one?

Frank Henderson: *"SEAMS organization emerged from the original South Carolina Needle Trades Show, a group of companies, vendors and suppliers to the textile and sewn products industries. Therefore, the first SEAMS / South Carolina Needle Trades meeting I attended was a South Carolina Needle Trades meeting. As SEAMS was established, Myrtle Beach, SC was the meeting place for many, many consecutive years (10+ years). My first SEAMS meeting was in the Mid-80's, not sure exactly what year, in Myrtle Beach. The thing I remember most was, 'These men and women are Passionate About the Textile and Sewn Products Industries.'"*



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Ron Roach: *"I have been attending SEAMS conferences for at least 25 years. I can not really pinpoint one specific thing about my first conference, but what has stayed with me over all of these years is the relationships built across the entire supply chain. SEAMS has always brought together people from different parts of the industry who might not otherwise have the opportunity to sit down and have a conversation."*

Jim Hopkins: *"About 20 years...and what I remember is how smart and knowledgeable everyone else was...I didn't know what(and how much) I didn't know."*

Jeoff Bodenhorst: *"Our company has been active in SEAMS for over 30 years. My first SEAMS meeting was in the Fall of 2011 when we met at Wild Dunes. I remember this meeting not only because it was my first, but also because I replaced our company representative on the Board of Directors, making it my first SEAMS board meeting as well."*

**Of all the SEAMS conferences you've attended, is there one that stands out?
Where was it, and what made it special?**

Frank Henderson: *"The most memorable for me personally, was in the 2022 SEAMS annual meeting, where I was completely stunned, having been selected as the Sarah Friedman Award recipient for commitment, devotion and support of All SEAMS members. Being acknowledged by SEAMS leadership, BOD and members is an Honor I will forever cherish, as there are many outstanding individuals and organizations, that were and are, deserving of this award."*

Ron Roach: *"I have always enjoyed the different locations SEAMS has chosen over the years, but for me, it has never been about the location. It is about the quality of the content, the speakers and the conversations that come out of it. I am especially looking forward to New Orleans in a few weeks. We have a dynamic lineup of speakers that I think will create some great conversations about where the industry is headed."*

Jim Hopkins: *"I think the first one in Savannah... it just seemed that everyone was networking and collaborating all at once."*

Jeoff Bodenhorst: *"I personally like the events that include tours. Most recently we met in Greensboro and visited Origin USA, where we heard from their team about their Made in the USA mission. Pete is very passionate about his company and I believe their*

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success speaks to the opportunity still present for SEAMS members and Domestic sewn products. That visit helped reaffirm some optimism for all of our futures in this industry."

What's your favorite SEAMS conference memory — whether from a meeting, dinner, golf outing, reception or something completely unexpected?

Frank Henderson: *"The first SEAMS meeting with another industry trade association was a joint meeting with SPESA in Myrtle Beach, SC. Two separate associations coming together and stating "We can Collaborate, Corporate and Partner" with each other for the Good of the Industry. I continue to see the fruits of this First: 2026 Shindig in Raleigh, NC during TechTextile where 11-Trade Associations met and partied together."*

Ron Roach: *"It is difficult to pick one particular memory after over 25 years. I always come back to the networking and the relationships that I have developed over time. There are people that I met through SEAMS many years ago who became friends, customers, suppliers and valuable industry resources. Those relationships are what I remember much more than any individual meeting or event."*

Jim Hopkins: *"That's easy...Receiving the Sarah Friedman award from Matt Poovey. It was actually awarded to both Roy Lockett and me, but I could not be present for the original presentation, so Roy accepted on our behalf...and then he had to keep it a secret so that Matt could later present it to me. There is an old saying that "3 people can keep a secret if 2 of them are dead." But Roy kept it a secret, as did everyone else who was present for the original award. Amazing."*

Jeoff Bodenhorst: *"A favorite memory is from one of the Savannah conferences where Harry Hamlin attended. I had the opportunity to join him at dinner and catch up with him afterward; it was a very interesting and memorable conversation!"*



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What's a SEAMS conference story that newer members probably haven't heard?

Frank Henderson: *"I, and other SEAMS members, are or have been, multi-generational organizations and have therefore, lived through the Berlin Wall coming down, watched the Chernobyl disaster on TV in real time, lived through the '89 Junk Bond crash, GATT, NAFTA, China admitted into the WTO, the 2008 financial crisis, in-sourcing, out-sourcing and the 2020 Global Pandemic. Through all these historical moments in history, the Textile and Sewn Products leadership and organizations have continued to Innovate and Change. Change is inevitable and "We" as the industry have had to Change and continue to Innovate and Change."*

Ron Roach: *"One of the things I'd tell a newer member is that at SEAMS, you are always one conversation away from an introduction to someone who could change your business. That has happened repeatedly over the years. Someone knows someone, makes an introduction, and suddenly you have a new supplier, customer, partner. or solution to a problem. That's the real value of SEAMS."*

Jim Hopkins: *"That Will Duncan was able to get Harry Hamlin from TV and movie fame to actually present at one of our meetings... It also happened to be in Savannah. And Harry actually hung around and had dinner with us...he was very engaging and approachable...quite a nice guy."*

Jeoff Bodenhorst: *"There are so many stories from these events because I have made so many friends during my SEAMS membership. I suggest newer members attend the conferences to make memories of their own!"*

I love receiving these answers and reflecting back on my own shared memories – the Savannah conference where Harry Hamlin spoke was fantastic. I have really enjoyed the industry tours we have gone on over the years, including NC State Wilson School of Textiles, Cotton Incorporated, Origin Manufacturing, UNIFI, and more. Having a chance to see behind the scenes and learning alongside your colleagues is an invaluable experience.

Newer members of SEAMS bring additional inspiration, resources, and life into the organization. I spoke with Cara Gilevich, Senior Manager, Global Materials Research and Development, Workwear Outfitters, who is a longtime member of the industry, but is a newer SEAMS member on her experience so far.



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How long have you been attending SEAMS conferences?

Cara Gilevich: *"My first SEAMS conference was in Raleigh in 2023. I had a year hiatus and returned for the Fall Conference in 2025."*

What's your most memorable SEAMS conference moment — and why does it still stand out?

Cara Gilevich: *"I would have to say the first time that I saw the karaoke machine roll in for the post network party in 2025. I knew that this was an organization that I needed to be a part of- but that moment made me realize how much I wanted to be a part of this crew!"*

Is there a particular conference, location, speaker, event or activity that you remember especially well?

Cara Gilevich: *"So many! However, dancing with the usual suspects in Greensboro, NC (including the two-legged pug ladies! 😊) stands out as one for the books! Also, doing karaoke to Love Shack with Shannon McCarthy, Xochil and Amy Bircher Bryun!"*

On a less party focused memory: The visit to Origin Manufacturing was incredibly inspiring - Pete Roberts is a force!"

Have you made a friendship or business connection at a SEAMS conference that has lasted over the years?

Cara Gilevich: *"In the short time that I have been a part of SEAMS, I have made so many new connections, while also reengaging in relationships that go back to my first year in the industry (1993- Hello Jim Hopkins!!!). The support of strong, professional women is profound in this organization. And I credit much of that to ladies like Xochil, Tanya and Nancy! I remember being invited to color with Donielle and the group and feeling so comfortable and safe. We all work so hard in a tough industry- and having these moments that I refer to as "breather" moments- makes it more palatable on the challenging days."*

SEAMS membership and the relationships that stem from our conferences are so important that many carry their commitment to new employers, encouraging them to join the association. This explains the value of SEAMS across one's career in textiles and why



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Tabitha Green, Senior Sourcing Manager, TVF, now represents her second SEAMS member at our conference and is on our Board of Directors.

You've been involved with SEAMS while representing more than one company. What made maintaining that SEAMS connection important to you?

Tabitha Green: *"Throughout my career, SEAMS has remained a valuable connection point because of the relationships it fosters across the textile and apparel supply chain. The organization brings together manufacturers, brands, suppliers, and service providers, creating opportunities to build meaningful connections and gain perspectives from every stage of the industry. What has kept me engaged over the years is the ability to connect with peers, exchange ideas, and learn from others who are equally passionate about strengthening our domestic supply chain. Those conversations often lead to new insights, collaborative opportunities, and lasting professional relationships. The networking opportunities and strong sense of community within SEAMS have been invaluable and are a big reason I've remained actively involved year after year."*

Do you remember your first SEAMS conference? What was your impression of the organization and the people?

Tabitha Green: *"Oh do I ever! My first SEAMS conference in Savannah, it was especially memorable because I was invited to speak alongside Phil Byerly about domestic sourcing. It was only my third public speaking opportunity, and I was still working through the nerves that come with standing in front of a room full of industry professionals. Fortunately, the SEAMS community was incredibly welcoming and supportive, which immediately put me at ease and made the experience much more enjoyable."*

What struck me most was how open and engaged everyone was. There was a genuine willingness to share ideas, discuss challenges, and help one another succeed. Little did I know that many of the people in that room would go on to become some of my favorite industry contacts and the people I still call today to brainstorm, problem-solve, and exchange ideas. That first conference showed me that SEAMS is much more than an industry organization. It's a community built on relationships, collaboration, and a shared passion for strengthening our industry."



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What's your favorite conference memory from your years with SEAMS?

Tabitha Green: *"One of my favorite SEAMS memories was joining TVF and having the opportunity to continue my involvement with the organization while also serving on the Board of Directors. It gave me a chance to contribute to the growth of an association that has meant so much to me throughout my career, while helping support an industry I'm deeply passionate about. What has made that experience especially rewarding is the people. There are many individuals within SEAMS whom I greatly respect and have looked up to throughout my career. Having the opportunity to engage with them, discuss the challenges and opportunities facing our industry, learn from their experiences, and connect with them on a personal level has been incredibly meaningful. Through SEAMS, I've built relationships with trusted colleagues, mentors, and friends who I regularly turn to for brainstorming, problem-solving, and sharing ideas.*

It's also been exciting to see more young professionals and women becoming active voices within our industry. As someone who has benefited from the guidance and support of others throughout my career, I appreciate the opportunity to both learn from

established industry leaders and encourage the next generation of talent. SEAMS creates an environment where those connections happen naturally, bringing together different perspectives and experiences that strengthen our industry as a whole. The sense of community, collaboration, and shared commitment to the future of U.S. textiles is what makes SEAMS so special, and being able to play a small role in that alongside such an accomplished group of professionals has been one of the highlights of my career.

Oh and for fun, I do love to spectate a good karaoke session after hours. Those never disappoint."

As we prepare for the Fall Conference in New Orleans, I am excited to reconnect with my SEAMS family and look forward to experiencing the culture of this great city for the first time. I am looking forward to informative and insightful presentations and the conversations that



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these always invoke amongst my colleagues. These talks inspire us to dream about the future. I look forward to making new connections, and welcome everyone to bring their dreams and take action and join us in New Orleans.

- Xochil