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NC Apparel Startups Form New Partnership, Rebuild Struggling American Apparel Sector

School House and Opportunity Threads elevate social responsibility and spur job growth in North Carolina with their "Made in America" partnership.

Durham, NC – For most North Carolinians, the good old days of textile and apparel manufacturing seem behind them. Mill children are now aging baby boomers, and abandoned cotton mills and textile plants are reminders of a storied past.

But for two North Carolina apparel startups, these "golden days" are more than recollections; they're a foundation for a new business partnership.

School House, an ethically sourced collegiate apparel company in Durham, NC, and Opportunity Threads, a worker-owned sewing cooperative in Morganton, NC, have partnered to bring a new brand of apparel manufacturing back to their home state.

The companies, which elevate social responsibility and whose business models put workers first, have a signed a deal that will 'inshore' apparel manufacturing to the U.S. and bring jobs and business back to the state in a big way.

"The School House and Opportunity Threads partnership gives a fresh face to North Carolina's rich history in textiles and apparel manufacturing," says Rachel Weeks, Founder and CEO of School House. "We're repurposing local talent and resources, creating a business that's relevant for a new generation of Americans."

School House began its ethical apparel manufacturing overseas after Weeks, a Duke graduate and Trinity Scholar, researched fair wage manufacturing as a Fulbright Scholar in Sri Lanka. Inspired by the impact better working conditions and fair pay had on workers, School House searched for a manufacturer to help bring their ethical production story to America.

For Opportunity Threads, School House marks the largest growth for the company to-date, and the volume and scale of the business provides them opportunities for long-term growth and scale.

The company, founded by fellow Duke alum and entrepreneur Molly Hemstreet, was born out of a desire to create better jobs in her rural community and synthesize ideas about sustainability and new labor models into a business that was as socially responsible as it was profitable.

"[Opportunity Threads] is building on the old. We're the new face of workers, new generation of thinking about textile industry, and new model of sustainability and environmental footprint and people taking the labor seriously," says Hemstreet.

Opportunity Threads will be the main cut and sew manufacturer of record for School House, and the partnership marks a new chapter for the collegiate apparel company. As School House shifted business

from Sri Lanka to the U.S., the company added ten North Carolina companies to its supply chain, supporting over 2,700 apparel workers in this state alone.

Both companies are currently pursuing grants and engaging investors in the state to help scale Opportunity Threads' assets for full package operations by end of 2011. They are also engaging local job training facilities, screenprinters, and fabric mills to support their vision for an end-to-end North Carolina supply chain.

As Weeks describes, "It takes a village to make a t-shirt."

You can read more about this success story at www.shopschoolhouse.com/madeinusa.aspx.

For more information, contact School House at Melissa@shopschoolhouse.com or by phone at [\(919\) 687-4000](tel:9196874000).

About School House: In 2007, Rachel Weeks traveled to Sri Lanka as a Fulbright Scholar to build a socially responsible clothing company. Her dream, which started with a t-shirt and an order from her alma mater at Duke, has transformed into School House, a fashion-forward, ethically sourced collegiate apparel brand.

School House's collections of men's and women's "Made in America" collegiate tees, hoodies, lounge pants, dresses and more are available online at www.shopschoolhouse.com and at 100+ collegiate bookstore retailers nationwide.

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