

CALIFORNIA ApparelNews

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DEBORAH BELGUM

CALIFORNIA RAIN: When Jack Chang opened California Rain Co. in 1988, he had about 10 employees and sent production to an outside contractor. Today the Los Angeles company employs about 150 people—including about 90 sewers and nearly 15 cutters.

Broken Homme Aims to Crack a Challenging Made-in-LA Niche: Footwear

By Andrew Asch Retail Editor

Southern California is a center for the design of casual footwear—think slip-ons and flip-flops—but **Broken Homme**, an emerging label headquartered in Long Beach, Calif., is waiting to see if the region is ready for manufacturing for a more complex footwear: work boots with a fashion edge.

The Broken Homme label is one of a handful of footwear manufacturers that designs and makes boots and men's dress shoes in Southern California. Broken Homme co-owner Jim Leatherman said he is looking to expand the wholesale business for the footwear brand in 2016, along with developing wholesale for a separate apparel business, called **Port**. The project might

include opening branded boutiques.

But Broken Homme is pushing against conventional manufacturing wisdom. Most of the vast market for footwear—sneakers, boots, pumps, slippers and most everything else—is manufactured in Asia, said James Appleby, vice president of **Etnies**, a footwear label headquartered in Orange County.

"There are a handful of footwear companies that manufacture footwear in California, mostly traditional leather or women's shoes," he said. Michael Jonte, a cofounder with the Los Angeles-area **Article Number** label, said that there is an interest in manufacturing footwear in Southern California, but the large investment involved is considered prohibitive.

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Christy Dawn Grows a Business From Vintage Styles

By Andrew Asch Retail Editor

Christy Dawn's "Audrey" dress recently hit the racks at **Free People**, a division of **Urban Outfitters Inc.** But the Made-in-Los Angeles label also is looking to build a higher profile for its vintage-inspired styles by opening a boutique in a burgeoning retail neighborhood.

The Christy Dawn boutique is located on Lincoln Boulevard in Los Angeles' Venice district. It is a big jump from what was essentially a cottage business for the label's cofounders, Christy Dawn Petersen and her husband, Aras

Baskauskas. He is the winner of the reality TV competition program "Survivor: Panama," which was broadcast in 2006.

Since January 2013, the couple ran the vintage dress label out of the garage of their Santa Monica, Calif., home. It is the first company helmed by Petersen, who built a career as a model. She continues to work part-time as a model for companies such as **Nexus**. Christy Dawn was funded with seed money from Petersen's modeling gigs. During her jobs, she said, Petersen often brainstormed on dresses that she wanted to make while modeling other labels' clothes.

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MADE IN AMERICA

Stitches Technology Begins Training Sewing Technicians

By Alison A. Nieder Executive Editor

On Dec. 1, the second group of students is scheduled to begin a six-month training program in technical sewing at **Stitches Technology**, the nonprofit run by Clotee McAfee.

Located in a two-room space at Los Angeles' historic **Hollywood Studio Club**, home of the Hollywood YWCA, the Stitches Technology Designing for Success Academy is equipped with single-needle, overlock and coverstitch sewing machines, an industrial cutting table and a classroom space where students will learn the technical skills needed to land entry-level jobs in the garment industry.

"We're training [sewing] operators, but I strongly believe that if they're going to be paid \$15 per hour, they have to be able to do more than sew to have a skill set to be of value to a company," McAfee said.

Stitches recently wrapped up its first training program for trainers, winnowing down a field of 10 to two, who will help train future students in the program.

The core of Stitches' program is technical training, but
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MADE IN AMERICA

Taking Advantage of the Push for Made in USA

By Deborah Belgum Senior Editor

When Jack Chang invested in an apparel business in 1988, a good number of California labels were still making their clothes in California.

Then the North American Free Trade Agreement came along in 1994, and many of those clothing labels—particularly California surfwear—headed south of the border to Mexico, where apparel production costs were lower and clothes could be brought back into the country free of duty.

Then China became a member of the **World Trade Organization** in late 2001, opening the door for that country to become the clothing factory to the world with super-low wages and production costs. Quotas on Chinese-made garments expired at the end of 2008, making that country even more competitive.

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BCBGmaxazria Expands to China

BCBGmaxazria is looking to the Chinese consumer to boost business.

The Los Angeles womenswear maker recently announced it has partnered with **VoyageOne** to sell its clothing online in China.

The BCBGmaxazria collection will be sold on **Alibaba's** Tmall through the VoyageOne platform. Alibaba is a Chinese e-commerce company that started out as a business-to-business service and has since expanded into business-to-consumer and consumer-to-consumer services. The website was founded in 1999 by Jack Ma.

VoyageOne is a business-to-consumer e-commerce provider that helps U.S.-based retailers and manufacturers to sell their products in China without having a bricks-and-mortar storefront.

"We are pleased to announce this partnership and the launch of BCBG on Tmall. We are very optimistic about the opportunity in China," said Max Azria, the LA company's founder, chairman and chief executive, in a statement.

Michelle Magallon, BCBGmaxazria's senior vice president of digital commerce and omnichannel, said China had been on the company's radar for some time and is an important international market.

Currently, the BCBGmaxazria winter collection is on sale on Tmall.

—Deborah Belgum

U.S. Trade Representative Visits Port of Long Beach

With 40 percent of the nation's cargo-container traffic arriving at Los Angeles-area ports, trade has become a very important economic engine for the area.

That fact was not lost on U.S. Trade Representative Michael Froman, who visited the **Port of Long Beach** on Nov. 24 on a swing through Los Angeles to promote the recently agreed-upon Trans-Pacific Partnership, a free-trade accord between the United States and 11 Pacific Rim countries. It still must be approved by Congress.

"California exports support hundreds of thousands of high-paying jobs and tens of thousands of businesses across the state," Froman said. "The Trans-Pacific Partnership is aimed at growing those benefits by cutting taxes on made-in-California exports and leveling the playing field for California workers and businesses by raising standards in one of the fastest-growing regions of the world."

"TPP includes unprecedented labor and environmental protections, helps small businesses export, keeps the Internet free and open, and safeguards American innovation

with intellectual-property protections."

California exports about \$173.8 billion a year, which supports 750,320 jobs in the state, Froman said, and \$75.5 billion of that amount comes through the Los Angeles/Long Beach port complex. In the Los Angeles area about 35,000 businesses export and 96 percent of them are small and medium-size enterprises.

Details of the Trans-Pacific Partnership were published earlier this month and are being analyzed by various industries, including the apparel and textile industry. The yarn-forward pact means more fabric may be produced in places such as Vietnam, which is a TPP signatory. While there is a significant amount of garments sewn in that Southeast Asian country, not that much fabric is produced there. But that is starting to change as more Chinese and South Koreans look to open textile factories in that country. Other TPP signatories are Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru and Singapore.

After touring the port, Froman visited

WET Design, a Los Angeles company that creates huge fountains for cities and major architectural projects. It was founded by former **Disney Imagineer** employees whose new company designed the **Bellagio** fountains in Las Vegas and the Dubai fountain.

About 80 percent to 90 percent of the company's revenue is from international sales. WET supports the TPP because it will give the country access to important countries in the Asia-Pacific region, especially Japan, while protecting its intellectual-property rights.

"Exporting our unique water features all over the world has been a tremendous source of growth for our company and a major factor driving our employment—which currently stands at over 300 people," said WET Chief Executive Mark Fuller. "We strongly support the Trans-Pacific Partnership because it will give WET and other small businesses like ours unprecedented access to vital economies in the Asia-Pacific region by reducing the import taxes that burden our work when facing foreign competition."

—D.B.

Combatant Gentlemen's New Suit, the Summit Collection

Combatant Gentlemen built a more-than- \$10-million company on the cheap suit.

The Irvine, Calif.-headquartered label's point of difference was that it owned the entire supply chain for its suits and its collection of men's clothing. It has an interest in sheep farms where wool is raised, it is a partner in the Chinese factories where the suits

are manufactured, and it sells its suits on its own e-commerce site (www.combatgent.com).

The starting retail price point for a suit is \$140, said Vishaal Melwani, the company's chief executive officer and lead designer. It offers suits that are at least one-quarter less expensive than much of its competition, he said. It is able to do so because its vertical retail model cuts out the fees charged by independent businesses, who often act as intermediaries between manufacturer and consumer.

But on Nov. 17, Combatant Gentlemen introduced a higher-end collection.

The label's "Summit Collection" of-



Combatant Gentlemen's Summit Collection

With a high-grade partner, there are more details to the suits, Melwani said.

"There are horn buttons, pick stitching—all of the details are there," he said.

More expansion is around the corner, Melwani said. "We're going into footwear next year," he said. The company also is considering opening a physical boutique. It plans to open a second showroom and office in downtown Los Angeles.

It could be a good time to expand a men's suiting company. U.S. sales of men's suits



fers suits with retail price points ranging from \$180 to \$320. Combatant Gentlemen makes the suits with the luxe fabrics from the Tollegno 1900 mill in Italy's Piedmont region.

increased 8 percent in the 12 months ending September 2015 to \$2 billion, according to market researchers **The NP Group, Inc./Consumer Tracking Service**.

—Andrew Asch

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Forever 21 Closing Huge Store in Central California

Forever 21 said it will be closing its 120,000-square-foot store in San Luis Obispo, Calif., in January and laying off scores of employees.

In a Nov. 12 letter sent to San Luis Obispo Mayor Jan Marx, Forever 21 said it will cease all store operations at the **San Luis Obispo Promenade** on or around Jan. 6.

The store employs 72 people, who will be given an opportunity to work at other Forever 21 stores or be laid off, said the letter, sent by Forever 21 Human Resources Manager Shavaun Burse. Inquiries to Forever 21 for comment were unanswered.

The employees affected include one store manager, two assistant store managers and 63 store associates.

The Forever 21 outpost at the San Luis Obispo Promenade makes up almost half of the shopping center, which was bought in

2014 by **The Kroenke Group**, based in Columbia, Mo.

In 2009, Forever 21 took over more than a dozen leases and bought three former **Gottschalks** department-store buildings after Gottschalks declared bankruptcy. Forever 21 bought the former Gottschalks department store in San Luis Obispo for \$8.5 million.

At the time of Forever 21's move into the former Gottschalks spaces, several shopping-center owners filed lawsuits objecting to Forever 21's moves.

The owners of the **Country Club Plaza Shopping Center** in Sacramento worried that Forever 21 didn't have the weight needed to occupy the anchor position held by Gottschalks.

"Landlord does not dispute that Forever 21 is a complementary tenant for the shopping center, in that its retail merchandise

suitably targets the desired customer," the shopping center's lawsuit said. "However, Forever 21 is not currently a national or regional anchor occupying 194,000 square feet in any shopping center in California." The landlord feared giving Forever 21 the lease would create a ripple effect that would result in financial disaster, the objection said. **Macy's** is now the anchor tenant at the Country Club Plaza Shopping Center.

In San Luis Obispo, it is unclear what will happen to the space being vacated by Forever 21. Property manager Trey Landes of The Kroenke Group deferred all questions to Forever 21.

San Luis Obispo Mayor Marx noted that the city is a commercial hub for the region and the residents would like to see another department store, such as a Macy's, occupy the Forever 21 space. "That Forever 21 store

was always empty," she said. "I don't know what that space is going to be used for."

She said The Kroenke Group bought the Gottschalks department store when it purchased the promenade in 2014 and leased the space back to Forever 21.

Forever 21 was founded in 1984 by Don Chang as a retail chain that occupied smaller spaces in shopping centers. The company's first store, in the Highland Park area of Los Angeles, was only 900 square feet.

But in mid-2006, Forever 21 launched its first department store-style outpost by converting an old **Saks Fifth Avenue** in Pasadena, Calif., into a 40,000-square-foot emporium.

Now the average Forever 21 store encompasses 38,000 square feet, with the largest space covering 162,000 square feet.

—Deborah Belgium

MADE IN AMERICA

Broken Homme

Continued from page 1

Big challenge

Leatherman spent a career in the marketing and design of fashion and footwear. He also served as brand manager for the **Matix** label in Torrance, Calif. He opened a boutique called Port in Long Beach as a side project in 2011. Call it good timing. Matix's former parent company, **Podium Distribution**, closed around 2012, and Leatherman found himself looking for a new gig.

A few months later, Leatherman's Broken Homme business partner, Joshua Johnson, left his job at the **Ezekiel** brand. Both men are avid bikers. Both had ideas about designing motorcycle boots. They were also intrigued by the challenge of manufacturing footwear locally.

"It's more difficult to get involved with; it's more technical and more costly," Leatherman said. "There are more barriers to



THE WORKS: Equipment at the Broken Homme factory

boutique footwear factory in Los Angeles County. The factory was looking for new work when a service-industry client moved its account to a new factory.

A visit to the factory was similar to time travel, Leatherman said. The factory's method of making shoes had not changed since the 1970s.

"The factory was lined with classic machines," Leatherman said. "They looked like cars from the 1950s. The welting machines looked like small dinosaurs."

Americana/heritage styles

The old machines seemed to be a good fit for the brand, which designs boots with an Americana/heritage look reminiscent of mid-20th-century styles. However, Leatherman and Johnson updated the look by making the heavy boots lightweight. Broken Homme's "James" boot, for example, features the Vibram 2040 sole, made from a combination of foam and

from boots to oxford and chukka shoes to leather sandals. Retail price points range from \$250 to \$300.

Broken Homme and Leatherman's Port brands are sold at Port, the boutique in Retro Row, Long Beach's easygoing, vintage-inspired boutique district. (Leatherman has ownership stakes in both Port and Broken Homme, but he noted that they are different brands with different sets of owners.)

In 2011, Leatherman started producing Port T-shirts to sell at the Port boutique. By 2013, he introduced a full collection, which included button-up shirts, custom athletic-style fleece and chinos with a lot of elastic. "It's like leisure contemporary wear," he said of the Port brand. Collaborations are crucial to Port. It offers five-panel hats made with the brand **The Quiet Life**. Bags are made with **Ebbets Field Flannels**. Port produced a capsule collection of women's swim looks with the label **Beach Riot**.

Port also did T-shirt capsule collections with **Pacific Sunwear of California** and a separate men's collection with the workwear brand **Dickies**.

The challenge, the reward

Leatherman declined to state his brands' sales, but he said



SHOP: The Port boutique in Long Beach



MANUFACTURERS: Jim Leatherman, left, and Joshua Johnson at the factory making their Broken Homme label

break through."

While there is a growing group of manufacturers making clothes in Southern California, footwear factories in the region are few and far between. Materials were also hard to find, Leatherman said. When they started the project, Leatherman and Johnson did all of their sourcing for leather in Chicago, Texas or Colorado, Leatherman said. (Currently, around 80 percent of Broken Homme leather is sourced in the Los Angeles area.)

In 2012, they used an Asian factory to make workman-style boots, but they were continually dissatisfied with the materials used in the boots and the service they got from the factory. What made it tougher is that they self-financed the project and ran through the seed money for the venture. It was time for Plan B.

Things started falling into place when a group of private investors agreed to fund them and a friend introduced them to a

rubber.

The heavy look and lightweight feel of the shoes was embraced by boutiques such as **Lone Flag** in Del Mar, Calif., near San Diego. Lone Flag owner Sam Larson said Broken Homme footwear looked like a boot but felt like a sneaker.

"Broken Homme is a lightweight, really wearable boot," Larson said. He is planning on opening a boutique in downtown San Diego in 2016.

Larson noted that heavier boots don't get much attention in Southern California because the weather is too mild for them if they are being worn for fashion. He also said heavy boots are too bulky to wear with the lifestyle and streetwear brands sold at his boutique.

Lone Flag has done several collaboration styles with Broken Homme since opening in late 2013.

It's part of the growing product mix at Broken Homme. Its factory turns out 100 pairs of shoes each week. They range

that they have grown 30 percent annually. Broken Homme has three employees, and both Port and Broken Homme recently hired the **Ouragny** showroom to increase the wholesale distribution of the company. In 2016, Broken Homme and Port will exhibit at the **Capsule** trade show in Las Vegas and New York.

Leatherman is also building a boutique vertical retail operation. His company will make clothes and footwear in Los Angeles County and sell them online at www.brokenhomme.com and www.portlbc.com, as well as at its branded Port boutique at 402 St. Louis Ave. in Long Beach.

With establishing his brands, Leatherman expects more challenges and rewards. They are part of the business.

"It's not easy, but it is 100 percent rewarding," he said of manufacturing. "I love seeing the creations coming to a place where people can pick them up. It is the most rewarding part of the business. It is bringing ideas and products to market." ●

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1980s

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RVCA's New Santa Monica Shop

For more than five years, the **RVCA** brand has handled its urban side with a retail store on Fairfax Avenue close to Los Angeles' Mid-City neighborhood. The Costa Mesa, Calif.-based company recently opened a boutique for its beach culture side in Santa Monica, Calif.

On Nov. 24, the company held a grand-opening party for its boutique at 2625 Main St. It is located a few blocks away from the Pacific Ocean, said Brian Cassaro, RVCA's vice president of marketing.

The Main Street space was the former site of a **Hurley** store. RVCA will devote much of the boutique's space—less than

fer RVCA's women's line, styles from the brand's denim program and, occasionally, exclusive T-shirts. For Fall 2016, the brand will be widening its array from the **VA Sport** collection, which will feature garments constructed out of performance fabrics, such as underwear, moisture-wicking tees and tops, and technical jackets.

RVCA is on the move. By the end of the month, it is scheduled to open a boutique in Byron Bay, Australia. Byron Bay is a center of Australian surf culture. It will be RVCA's fifth branded shop, Cassaro said. For more than three years, it has run a shop in Honolulu's Waikiki Beach enclave. It also has a



1,000 square feet—to the work of creatives involved in RVCA's Artist Network Program. Surfboard shaper Ellis Ericson will display some of his boards at the Santa Monica shop. Objets d'art from Kevin Ansell's recent gallery show, "Nos Vemos en Venecia," also will be exhibited at the new RVCA shop.

The Santa Monica shop also will of-

shop in San Francisco.

RVCA was started in the garage of founder Pat Tenore in 2001. The popular brand was acquired by **Billabong International Ltd.** in 2010. A Billabong statement noted that RVCA was able to appeal to many action sports-friendly subcultures such as surfing, skating and mixed martial arts as well as the art scene.—*Andrew Asch*

Calendar

Dec. 3

TPC's Holiday Networking Event
AT&T Center
Los Angeles

Dec. 5

Line and Dot sample sale
2807 S. Santa Fe Ave.
Vernon, Calif.

"Fashion Illustrator Using Photoshop CS6," presented by Fashion Business Inc.
California Market Center, A792
Los Angeles

Dec. 12

"Line Sheets in Photoshop CS6," presented by Fashion Business Inc.
California Market Center, A792
Los Angeles

Dec. 15

Speed Consulting at Fashion Business Inc.
California Market Center, A792
Los Angeles

Dec. 16

TALA Annual Christmas Party
Cooper Design Space
Los Angeles

There's more
on ApparelNews.net.

For calendar details and contact information, visit ApparelNews.net/calendar.

Submissions to the calendar should be faxed to the Calendar Editor at (213) 623-5707. Please include the event's name, date, time, location, admission price and contact information. The deadline for calendar submissions is the Tuesday prior to Friday publication. Inclusion in the calendar is subject to available space and the judgment of the editorial staff.

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Christy Dawn *Continued from page 1*

While the label makes dresses that evoke an aesthetic of a different time, there is beauty in taking a break from contemporary styles, Petersen said. “The silhouettes are sensual without being overtly sexy. You’ll find things in vintage dresses that you won’t find in today’s fashion,” she said. Pop star Taylor Swift wore a Christy Dawn dress in a video for her song “Style.”

The dresses are made out of deadstock fabric, or surplus fabric that bigger companies may dispose of. The Christy Dawn production runs range from two pieces to 25 pieces. The dresses are produced in downtown Los Angeles. Christy Dawn’s dresses are wholesale priced at \$75 to \$250.

More than 60 percent of the label’s sales come from its e-commerce site (www.christydawn.com). The rest comes from its store at 1930 Lincoln Blvd., on the corner of Lincoln and Amoroso Place. It is located in a neighborhood of small boutiques that started opening a year ago. Its neighbors include boutiques **Late Sunday Afternoon** and **Bassike**.

Petersen said the neighborhood was becoming the new Abbot Kinney Boulevard in Venice. The high-profile Abbot Kinney transformed from a retail neighborhood of unique shops into a nationally known retail street with high-end boutiques. “There’s a surprisingly good amount of foot traffic,” she said of her section of Lincoln Boulevard.

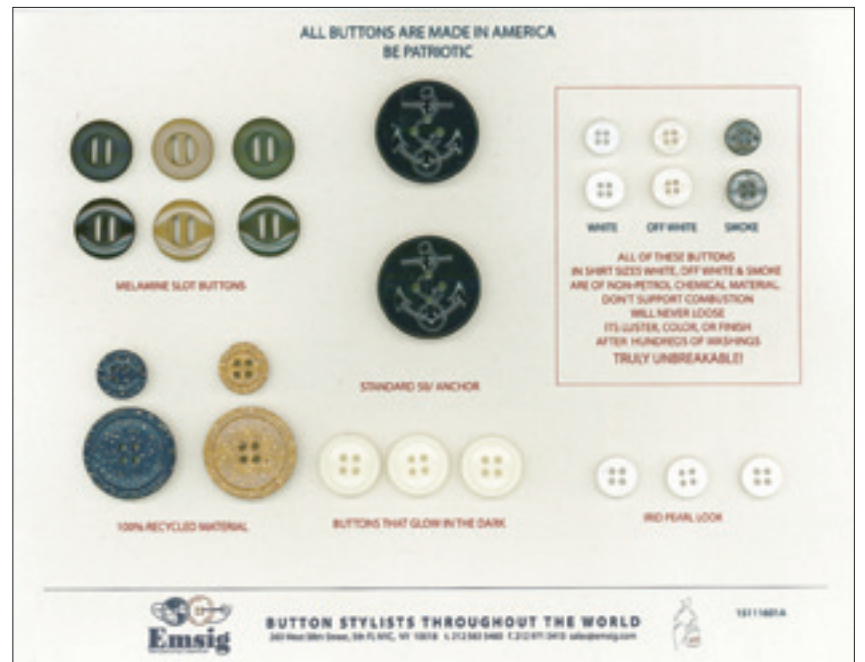
Momo Takahashi, a Venice resident and writer for periodicals such as *Safari*, a Japanese magazine, said more than three new brands and retailers have opened boutiques on Lincoln Boulevard in the past 12 months.

“Rent is [relatively] cheap, you can park easily, and there is more variety,” she said of the fashion boutiques on the street. ●



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James Cox Knits: Kits for Men's Knits

James Cox is looking to put knitting needles—and knit menswear designs—into the hands of home knitters with a collection of knitting kits.

“As an art form, knitting has found an audience, and artists are staging exhibitions at leading galleries, museums and unique events in public venues around the world. I am hopeful that my brand will fill what research has shown to be a gap within the knitting community—a lack of men’s knitwear patterns that are well matched with knitters’ preferences,” Cox said.

In October, Cox launched **James Cox Knitting**, a collection of knitting kits for creating men’s sweaters and accessories.

(Cox splits his time between Los Angeles and the Virgin Islands, but his company is based in Los Angeles.)

Each knitting kit includes yarn, a knitting-pattern brochure and schematics for creating the design. For the more-complicated styles, there is a row checker created to make the knitting process easier. Tools, such as knitting and darning needles, are not included, but the kits suggest which sizes to use for each style.

The kits collection consists of six sweaters and five accessories-style patterns. The sweaters include a sporty crew-neck with contrasting sleeves, an all-over cable design, a basket-weave design and a chunky ski sweater. There is a pullover style with optional buttoned pleats at the waist and a linen sweater that mimics a white dress shirt with a neckband, collar, button cuffs and tails. The accessories include gym socks with a bright red toe, a reversible skull cap hat or ear warmer kit, fingerless gloves, an infinity scarf and a two-toned knit tie.

Most styles are available in a range of colors and yarns, including merino wool, lace-weight baby alpaca, hand-dyed cashmere and linen as well as cotton, silk and bamboo blends.

The sweater kits are priced between \$125 and \$250, and the accessories kits range from \$30 to \$75.

“All of my life I have been intrigued by fashion design and construction,” Cox said. “I frequently stroll through designer boutiques examining the men’s knitwear ideas being presented in the season’s creations, feeling the fabrics, analyzing stitches and studying how they are constructed.”



James Cox



Knitting a new business

James Cox learned to knit as a child along with his two sisters. As an adult, he worked in advertising as a creative director for clients such as



Apple, Disney, Yamaha, Neutrogena, Colonial Williamsburg, Northrop, Shimanu, Four Seasons and the Islands of Tahiti. By day, he would create ad campaigns, but at night he found himself knitting sweaters for himself

and gifts for family and friends, including hats, scarves, baby blankets and gloves.

“I always had a sweater project on needles,” he said. “Now, 37 years later, I have a closet full of sweaters that I designed and knitted.”

A few years ago, Cox began to think about launching a new business venture based on knitting. “It was becoming clear that given the choice I’d rather knit a sweater than create an ad campaign,” he said.

But Cox didn’t really envision himself as a fashion designer until three years ago while visiting Paris. He was in a men’s designer boutique when the owner approached him, asking who designed the sweater he was wearing. “I told him I designed and made it myself. He then handed me his card and said, ‘When you’re ready to launch your line, call me.’ I walked out of that boutique feeling I was indeed a fashion designer who could launch his own line of men’s knitwear.”

Cox started researching the market, surveying knitters across the country to determine how they felt about the men’s patterns that are currently available. “They [seem to] prefer patterns that are traditional, casual, tailored and fashionable,” Cox said. “Of those surveyed, 56.7 percent stated their satisfaction with men’s patterns was average and an additional 38.3 percent below average or poor.”

The knit kits were created to pair Cox’s designs with the ideal yarn so he could “partner” with knitters in the act of making sweaters. The kits are packed in a backpack-style project bag, which features a zippered pocket for carrying a ball of yarn and a hole to feed yarn through. He also developed the kit’s row checker to keep track of stitch counts, increases, decreases and other details row by row.

“Knitters love this idea,” Cox said.

Cox connects with knitters on **Ravelry** (www.ravelry.com) a social community for knitters worldwide.

“Before the Internet, knitters connected via their local knitting shop,” Cox said. “Today, the little mom-and-pop-style knitting retailers are still at the heart of the knitting world. [However] knitters are taking advantage of the many social channels available to them. Just look at Ravelry, with hundreds of millions of page views, community members around the world and a database of almost one-quarter-million patterns,” Cox said.

James Cox Knits kits are available at www.jamescoxnits.com. For sales information, call (562) 626-9173.

—Sarah Wolfson

www.lineanddot.com

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CELEBRATING 38 YEARS

Stitches *Continued from page 1*

there is additional study in fashion history and textiles.

"I don't think an operator can be effective if he or she doesn't understand the history and the textiles," she said.

There is also life-skills training such as nutrition counseling and self-esteem building.

"It's a holistic approach," McAfee said. "The concept is they won't just be good for employers, they'll be better for themselves."

Students in the six-month course will meet four days per week, Monday through Thursday, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. In addition to skills training, students will have an opportunity to hear from guest lecturers to learn how the industry works. McAfee brought the first group to the **Los Angeles International Textile Show** earlier this year. Fridays will serve as an optional day, when students can take a yoga class at the center or have an opportunity to meet with prospective employers.

"I want to start those relationships now," McAfee said.

McAfee hopes the program will fill the gap between the industry's need for skilled, entry-level workers and young people in the region who are looking for work.

"For those who don't have defined career goals or college aspirations, who dropped out of high school or are searching for a place to plant their roots and grow, the fashion and apparel industry offers opportunities," McAfee said. "And it will give them a sense of purpose and accomplishment while providing a livable wage."

Stitches will focus on sewing rather than design. Some of the students in the Stitches program may opt to move on to a two- or four-year program at local design schools such as **Los Angeles Trade-Technical College** or the **Fashion Institute of Design & Merchandising**. Others may focus on finding a sewing job immediately after completing the program. Some may want to start their own business at some point. And some may supplement the Stitches training with additional study as part of a career plan designed for them. For example, McAfee said, one student who started the program in August is looking to pick up additional training in costing at L.A. Trade-Tech.



Clotee McAfee

nism—and they will. When [the students] leave me, they're going to be not just good but great. They will have the skills as well as the attitude to be successful in any work environment we place them in. It is an opportunity for us, but it's going to take time to build it. But anything great takes time."

McAfee said she hopes to start placing students in permanent jobs by June.

From demo to implementation

Funding for Stitches Technology comes from several sources, including a \$50,000 grant from **Chase Community Giving**, the philanthropic arm of **JPMorgan Chase**; \$5,000 from **Wells Fargo**; and in-kind donations from companies such as **9 to 5 Seating** and **IRS Demolition**. Partners include the **California Fashion Association**, **Juki America Inc.**, **TC2**, **Southern California Edison**, **Karen Kane**, **CORT Furniture**, **Stevland Morris**, the **YWCA** and Jan Perry, general manager of the city of Los Angeles' Economic and Workforce Development Office.

This is McAfee's second iteration of Stitches Technology. In 1998, she opened an 18,000-square-foot facility in South Los Angeles with a \$500,000 federal demonstration grant and \$1.5 million of in-kind support from the apparel industry thanks, in part, to a benefit headlined by Stevie Wonder. The South Los

➔ **Stitches** page 9



TRAINING CENTER: The Stitches Technology Designing for Success Academy is equipped with single-needle, overlock and coverstitch sewing machines; an industrial cutting table; and a classroom space, where students will learn the technical skills needed to land entry-level jobs in the garment industry.

The schedule was set to allow time for students who also have to hold down a job or want to attend college at night.

McAfee is working with the **Hollywood WorkSource Center**, which is recruiting potential students and conducting interviews. She envisions potential students as coming from two key groups. The first are those ages 18 to 30 who have graduated high school or have a GED (General Educational Development) Certificate but are not interested or ready for a two-year degree program.

In January, Stitches will begin recruiting the second key group of potential students—high school seniors—for a session scheduled to begin in August 2016.

With apparel brands and retailers increasingly looking for made-in-America manufacturing options, Stitches' students could meet the growing need for skilled sewing operators in Southern California.

"It's very timely, but we have to prove ourselves to the industry," she said. "They need to see us as a viable training mecha-



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California Rain *Continued from page 1*

But despite those major trade developments, Chang and his **California Rain Co.** have continued to survive on the edge of the **Los Angeles Fashion District**, growing into a thriving apparel factory that is getting a renewed burst of energy from retailers and manufacturers still interested in that "Made in USA" label.

"We are getting the benefit of people like **Walmart** and **Target** saying they want to do more U.S.-made production," Chang said.

Today, California Rain employs about 150 people—many of whom have worked with the company for decades. The sewing staff includes approximately 90 people, and another 12 to 14 employees work as cutters. When Chang started out, he had only about 10 employees and was using clothing contractors to cut and sew his orders.

But soon, California Rain grew into a full-package company. The company's specialty is knitwear, producing tops, dresses and bottoms. "We make everything from little kids' onesies to men's XXXXXXL," said Bob Lindenbaum, a sales rep who has been with the company for 22 years.

Past clients include **Billabong**, **Gotcha**, **Hurley**, **Tilly's**, **Urban Outfitters**, **Quiksilver**, **True Religion**, **Macy's** and **Junk Food Clothing**.

The advantage of domestically produced goods is that California Rain can whip up samples in two to three weeks and make production garments in four to eight weeks—all inside a 40,000-square-foot fa-

cility that encompasses two red-brick buildings separated by an alley. California Rain's production schedule is a vast improvement over the three to six months it takes to get goods ordered and shipped from China.

Other services provided by the company include having a designer on hand to help with creating trendy garments and a staff to help develop special fabrics, trims and custom garments.

One California manufacturer, who asked not to be identified, said he has been working at the California Rain Co. for around 15 years and likes the fact that domestic production gets him goods sooner than sourcing in China. "If you are manufacturing in the USA, there are not a lot of people who are the size of Jack's company," he said.

On a recent visit, garment workers were sewing red-and-green polar fleece pajamas for the upcoming holiday season. In another wing, recently sewn striped knit dresses were hanging on rolling racks. Nearby workers were rolling a long bolt of bright-green reflective fabric onto a cutting table to be fashioned into togs for safety workers.

In the world of just-in-time delivery, California Rain Co. has found a niche with manufacturers and retailers.

Recently, Target Corp. was touring the factory to make sure California Rain Co. was compliant with various employment laws and environmental standards required by the big retailer. Wal-Mart Stores Inc. has approved the factory for production as has



Doing production at the California Rain Co. on 14th Street in the Los Angeles Fashion District

Vince Taps Founders to Boost Label's Business

Sometimes you have to take one step back to move two steps forward.

That's the philosophy the contemporary label **Vince** is taking. The now New York-based company has hired the label's two founders—Rea Laccone and Christopher LaPolice—to help develop the brand's products, merchandising and creative efforts.

Laccone and LaPolice, who signed a two-year agreement, started Vince in Los Angeles in 2002 and were with the company through January 2013. The label was acquired by the **Kellwood Co.** in 2006, an apparel venture that later was purchased in 2008 by an affiliate of **Sun Capital Partners** in a leveraged buyout.

In 2013, Vince went public as a separate entity from Kellwood and now is traded on the New York Stock Exchange.

"Rea and Christopher, who created the original vision for Vince 13 years ago, bring tremendous creative talent to the brand. We look forward to drawing upon their design and merchandising expertise to enhance our product offering," said Vince Chief Executive Brendan Hoffman, who joined Vince in October after spending more than two years as the chief executive and president of **The Bon-Ton Stores**. "While product is our first priority, we are also working to develop a strong foundation from which we can drive consistent profitable growth for the long term."

The brand has been through a tumultuous time lately. Last summer, after leading Vince through an IPO in 2013, Jill Granoff resigned as the chief executive, and Karin Gregersen followed in her footsteps, leaving as president and chief creative officer.

Granoff was a veteran executive in the apparel and cosmetics industry and at one time worked at **Liz Claiborne Inc.** as an executive vice president in charge of **Juicy Couture**, **Lucky Brand** and **Kate Spade**.

But days after Granoff made public her departure, the company announced that net sales for the second quarter ending Aug. 1 declined 10.4 percent to \$80 million from \$89.3 million during the same period in 2014. The company experienced a \$5 million net loss compared with a \$10.5 million profit for the same period in 2014.

The company over the years has expanded from womenswear to menswear, childrenswear, handbags and footwear. It is known for its luxury cashmere sweaters and high-end apparel that is trendy but casually chic.

"Christopher and I are excited to be returning to Vince as this is a brand with tremendous long-term potential," Laccone said. "We believe that customers have looked to Vince for everyday luxury essentials with modern, effortless style, and we will work with the team to deliver product that reflects this aesthetic." —*Deborah Belgium*

Stitches *Continued from page 7*

Angeles facility closed in 2002.

With the current funding, McAfee is implementing the new training program with a focused approach and plans to expand. Eventually, McAfee would like to see between 50 and 100 students pass through the program annually. She would like to add a social enterprise component to the program as well so students can also produce items such as canvas tote bags. Another plan is to offer recruiting and training services to manufacturers looking to expand their own sewing capabilities. And she'd like to add a dormitory or bring in a housing partner to help the students who need a place to live close to the center.

"Today, Stitches Technology has become much more relevant than it was back then due to the growing demand for garments produced in America and unreliable sources of workers to meet this demand," said CFA President Ilse Metchek. "This will help the growth and development of the California apparel and textile industry."

On a mission

Trained at New York's **Fashion Institute of Technology**, McAfee has worked as fashion

designer, costume designer and contractor.

McAfee likes to say design is her passion, but "Stitches is my mission."

Between the original launch of the Stitches demonstration facility and the current training program, McAfee spent five years teaching fashion design at **Compton High School** through the Compton Unified School District's regional occupational program.

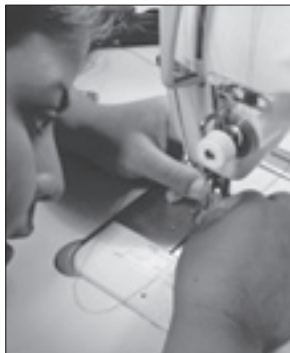
"That was critical to identify the population that is falling through the cracks. They need our help the most," McAfee said.

McAfee said she helped advance Compton High's program by bringing in industrial cutting tables and sewing machines so the students could work on the same equipment used in the apparel industry.

"Our industry is as significant as nursing," McAfee said, adding that unlike nursing, there are few programs to bridge high school programs such

as LAUSD and Compton's ROP program with entry-level jobs in apparel.

"I believe that Stitches Designing for Success Academy will be that link," McAfee said. "I've been a contractor and manufacturer. I've had the benefit of working in each area. This is an opportunity to pour everything I know into these students and this program." ●



GETTING TECHNICAL: Students in Stitches' six-month course will meet four days per week to learn technical sewing techniques as well as additional instruction in fashion history and textiles.

California Rain

Continued from previous page

Costco Wholesale Corp. California Rain also has a certification from **WRAP**, a global nonprofit that inspects factories around the world for social compliance and proper work conditions.

Chang's latest challenge to keeping his factory up and running is the proposed increase in Los Angeles' minimum wage, which will raise workers' basic salary from its current \$9 an hour to \$15 an hour by 2020.

Many Los Angeles clothing manufacturers have threatened to leave the city and set up production in nearby Commerce or Vernon. But even that might not be a solution if the state passes a similar proposal.

"The rise in the minimum wage is so scary for us," Chang said. "But we feel if we can be more efficient and get the right price, we can prevail."

He is already looking to the future. His three children are working at his factory, learning the ins and outs of the fashion world. ●



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Kitson Sued and Reportedly Sold

Prominent Los Angeles–headquartered boutique **Kitson** was sued by **Vivienne Westwood** on Oct. 2.

A-List Inc., which does business as Kitson, was sued for breach of contract by **Rio Bravo Inc.**, which does business as Vivienne Westwood, the brand from influential British designer Vivienne Westwood. It also runs the Vivienne Westwood boutique in West Hollywood, Calif., which is a 10-minute drive from the Kitson flagship store.

According to a complaint filed in Los Angeles County Superior Court, A-List made a deal with Rio Bravo for \$41,363 worth of clothes in 2014.

A-List received the goods but never paid for them, the suit claims. In an answer to the complaint, attorneys for Kitson said that the “plaintiff voluntarily exposed itself to the injury it reportedly incurred with knowledge and appreciation for the risk involved.”

The adversaries are scheduled to go to

a case management conference at Superior Court in Los Angeles on Feb. 16. Attorneys involved in the case did not return phone calls requesting comment.

The lawsuit was filed after what was a busy summer for Kitson. **Spencer Spirit Holdings Inc.**, owner of a fleet of 650 novelty gift mall shops **Spencer Gifts** and **Spirit Halloween Superstores**, acquired Kitson in June. The investment helped Kitson avoid filing for bankruptcy, according to the *Wall Street Journal*. In 2013, Kitson received a \$15 million credit line from **Salus Capital Partners**, headquartered in Boston. The financing was used to take care of debt and provide working capital for the company.

Spencer Spirit is owned by **Acon Investments LLC**, a private equity investment firm with offices in Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. Phone calls and emails sent to Kitson executives as well as Acon were not returned by press time.

Kitson runs more than 18 locations

across the United States. But it runs a concentration of its fashion and gift shops in Los Angeles’ Golden Triangle area, including more than four stores on Robertson Boulevard. It runs an emporium a few miles away in West Hollywood. The Kitson nameplate also does business in Japan. In March, Kitson bowed out of running two shops at **Los Angeles International Airport** after a disagreement with the **Hudson Group**, the company that operated the shops.

Kitson opened on Robertson Boulevard in 2000 and quickly developed a reputation as a place where celebrities would get photographed by paparazzi. The store also cultivated a reputation as being the place that would gamble on new contemporary, denim and pop-culture brands before they skyrocketed to popularity. Brands that have been sold at Kitson include **True Religion**, **Wildfox Couture** and **Brian Lichtenberg**.—*Andrew Asch*

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