

# CALIFORNIA Apparel News

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## HOLIDAY 2019 RETAIL

After all the forecasts were published, retailers promoted their best deals and consumers spent their hard-earned dollars, experts weighed in regarding the performance of retail during the 2019 holiday season. While a few obstacles arose, overall sales were reportedly robust this year.



### LEGAL

## New California Laws in 2020: From Employment-Status Changes to Family Leave

By Dorothy Crouch *Managing Editor*

A new year means new California workplace laws in which employers must become well versed. For 2020, Gov. Gavin Newsom has signed into law a number of bills that protect workers' rights and, also, redefine the role of employees. In 2020, apparel-industry executives and company owners must be up to speed regarding new laws and amendments to ensure a workplace environment conducive to a successful business.

Most importantly, according to Aaron Renfro, attorney and shareholder at Newport Beach, Calif., law firm **Call & Jensen**, employers should not only review the details of these new laws but also retain counsel to ensure companies are

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### RETAIL

## Holiday 2019 Sales Were Strong

By Andrew Asch *Retail Editor*

Sales for the 2019 holiday retail season increased 3.4 percent, and the big winner was e-commerce, which shot up 18.8 percent compared to the 2018 holiday season. E-commerce made up 14.6 percent of total retail purchases during this time, according to **Mastercard SpendingPulse**, a research division of the **Mastercard** payments network.

Sales within e-commerce for specialty apparel also represented a big winner during the 2019 holiday. Sales increased 17 percent in a year-over-year comparison. Gains for total apparel saw an uptick of 1 percent in a year-over-year comparison.

Mastercard's assessment of holiday 2019 business also found an acceleration of e-commerce sales at department stores, which increased 6.9 percent. However, overall sales in the department-store category declined 1.8 percent. The sea-

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Where fashion gets down to business<sup>SM</sup>



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# Park Hotels & Resorts Completes Sale of Ace Hotel Downtown Los Angeles

The **Ace Hotel Downtown Los Angeles** has officially been sold to an undisclosed buyer, according to an announcement made by Tysons, Va.-headquartered lodging real-estate investment trust **Park Hotels & Resorts Inc.**

In 2015, the Annapolis, Md.-based **Chesapeake Lodging Trust** acquired the 14-story Spanish Gothic property for \$103 million, or approximately \$566,000 per key, entering into a new management agreement with the **Ace Hotel Group**. In May 2019, Chesapeake Lodging Trust announced that it would be acquired by Park Hotels & Resorts Inc. This deal closed on Sept. 18.

Park Hotels & Resorts' agreement to sell the Ace Hotel Downtown Los Angeles was executed in November, but the official announcement was made on Dec. 20.

"We are very pleased to announce the successful execution of our 20th non-core asset sale, which helps deliver on our stated objective of reducing leverage following our recent acquisition of Chesapeake Lodging Trust,"

Thomas J. Baltimore, Jr., chairman and chief executive officer of Park Hotels & Resorts Inc., said in a statement. The property was sold for \$117 million, or \$643,000 per key.

"We have now sold approximately \$1 billion in assets since our formation less than three years ago, taking advantage of strong buyer interest and our deep relationships with the investment community in order to achieve our strategic goals," Baltimore said in a press release. "We remain confident in our ability to deliver on our near-term objectives of upgrading the quality of the portfolio while also maintaining a low-levered balance sheet, which will serve us well in all phases of the lodging cycle."

After debuting in January 2014 at 929 S. Broadway, the Ace became a **Los Angeles Fashion District** favorite. The 182-room hotel remains a popular location for hosting apparel-industry meetings and events, such as **Vegan Fashion Week**, which kicked off its October edition at the 1,600-seat Theatre at Ace Hotel.—*Dorothy Crouch*



Theatre at Ace Hotel

## Good American Adopts Klarna Technology

Buy-now, pay-later technology company **Klarna** announced that it has partnered with Los Angeles brand **Good American**. The trend-driven clothing brand was founded in 2016 by Emma Grede and Khloé Kardashian with a focus on denim and a range of sizes to suit women who wear 00–24.

"Shopping is such a personal experience,

especially with a powerhouse brand like Good American that caters to all women with an inclusive range of products and sizes," Klarna Chief Executive Officer Sebastian Siemiatkowski said in a statement. "At Klarna, customers are the center of all we do. We strive to offer payment options that meet their evolving needs and above all to instill

joy back into the shopping experience. Good American is the perfect partner to celebrate empowerment throughout the shopping experience."

This recent partnership will now allow customers of the brand to shop online and pay for goods in four installments. Interest-free and fee-free payments can be made bi-weekly, or consumers can also choose a pay-later option after 30 days. In celebration of the partnership, which was announced Dec. 18, Klarna has partnered with Good American and **IMG Models** on the clothing brand's fourth Open Casting campaign. The initiative will be available in five countries—the United States, Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom and Australia—as an effort to create a diverse cast of women to define the Good American brand.

The Stockholm, Sweden-headquartered Klarna launched in 2005. Klarna now works with more than 190,000 brands and boasts offices in cities around the globe, including Los Angeles.—*D.C.*

## Runway Heels Debuts in Pop-up Retail Space

Convertible-footwear brand **Runway Heels** recently expanded into retail through a pop-up shop model at **Westfield Century City**. The Studio City, Calif., brand was founded by Melody AVECILLA in 2015.

The shoes' convertible designs rely on a push button that allows wearers to retract or extend a heel, affording both a flat or a pump within one product.

"We are breaking the myth that shoemaking can only be done a certain way," Runway Heels Chief Executive Officer Melody AVECILLA said in a press release. "With our patented technology, you can change from flats to high heels or vice versa in a matter of seconds all at the push of a button."

The brand has moved from its exclusively direct-to-consumer model into a temporary retail space. Unveiled Dec. 20, the pop-up shop will remain open until Jan. 18.

"It has been our team's mission from the beginning to offer high heels that provide style without sacrificing comfort," AVECILLA said in a statement. "This is a disruptive fashion technology product that will revolutionize women's footwear."—*D.C.*

## Week in Review

**David's Bridal** announced that Lizzy Ellingson would be the bridal—and-special occasion apparel company's first chief digital experience officer. Ellingson will lead the digital transformation of the brand, based in Conshohocken, Pa. She will report to Kelly Cook, the company's chief marketing officer. "When we think about everyone who wants to seize the moment with the perfect dress, we think experience, we think digital, we think magical moments," Cook said. "Lizzy has a vision for all three."

**Summersalt** is a St. Louis-based direct-to-consumer travel-wear brand. It recently announced that it had raised \$17.3 million in a series B round of funding led by Mercato Partners. The new funding will help the brand build new apparel categories. Summersalt started business in 2017 and offers eco-friendly, affordable, size-inclusive swimwear. It also has recently unveiled an apparel collection that includes cashmere, packable jackets and wrinkle-free pants.

**Emanuel Ungaro** died Dec. 21 at age 86. The French designer was considered one of the last independent couturiers to run an independent fashion house. Ungaro started his career working with legendary designers Cristóbal Balenciaga and André Courrèges. In the 1960s, Ungaro increasingly developed his own fashion work and styles and later had clients such as Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, Catherine Deneuve and Britney Spears. In 2005, Ungaro sold his fashion business to venture capitalist Asim Abdullah for \$84 million.

**QVC** founder Joseph M. Segel passed away Dec. 21 at age 88. A career entrepreneur, in 1964 he founded the commemorative coin company Franklin Mint. In 1986, he put together the retail network QVC, which can be accessed by 380 million homes on 15 television networks as well as on 11 websites and by 10 million Facebook viewers, according to a QVC statement. Segel retired from QVC in 1993 and continued to advise it for a decade. Mike George, president and CEO of QVC, said Segel's ideas on retail continue to influence the company and the wider world. "He was a visionary whose ideas changed the way the world shops," George said. "He instilled the importance of customer focus and putting the customer first in everything we do. These founding values and Joe's trailblazing spirit are still very much a part of who we are today."

**Barollo**, an Italian bespoke footwear company, recently announced a limited-edition footwear collection called Red Shoe. The dress shoe was inspired by Patrice Banks, an engineer who switched careers and became a car mechanic to change the auto-repair industry, which has traditionally been overwhelmingly staffed by men. In 2016, Banks opened the Girls Auto Clinic, an auto-repair center entirely staffed by women. It's located in Upper Darby, Pa., about a half-hour drive from Philadelphia. Since then, Banks has become an in-demand speaker who has written a guide to auto maintenance and inspired a shoe that features a heel reminiscent of a mechanic's wrench. Barollo said that production on the shoe will begin in February. A portion of the proceeds will benefit the Girls Auto Clinic.

**KINDOM**  
humans + nature + balance  
sustainable fashion

A lifestyle brand established in 2017, **KINDOM** is a contemporary, slow fashion brand that combines style, sustainability, & indigenous textiles from around the globe into trend-focused styles that have meaning and purpose.

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# L.A. Factory Achieves Major Sustainability Goal by Backing It Up With Tech

By Andrew Asch Retail Editor

Sustainable design is increasingly important in California, and one factory said it has achieved a gold standard in sustainability. UStrive, based in Los Angeles, was certified by the Global Organic Textile Standard last month.

Scott Wilson, president of UStrive, described it as an arduous process. To be certified by GOTS, nothing about a company's production practices and supply-chain sourcing could be left to question.

"It took eight months of training, auditing and reinventing how we make clothing. This was a paper-trail nightmare. You are asking four people to sign off on every document," he said. He thought there had to be a better way to track the supply chain when seeking GOTS certification.

Wilson, a veteran manufacturing executive got involved in creating UStrive because he wanted to know what was needed to make a 100 percent organic shirt. The manufacturing of organic shirts is not much different than the process at traditional factories, which have been critiqued for polluting. Wilson asked his peers if they wanted to build an organic factory.

"This was a paper-trail nightmare," Wilson said. "You are asking four people to sign off on every document. The first group of people were skeptical. They said, 'Give us an order, we'll think about it.' That's the way the industry works. They react to orders."

He also encountered a lot of people who just didn't want to deal with the bureaucracy required to be certified organic, but, in 2018, he met manufacturers with similar goals. The group formed UStrive. It is the vertical integration of Tour Image and three other companies, **Jin Clothing**, **Care-Tex Industries** and **S&B Printing and Embroidery**, all of which have deep roots in the local apparel industry.

Tour Image is a 22-year-old sales and design-development company, while Jin is a private-label apparel manufacturer



Anthony Sim, left, and Scott Wilson hold GOTS certifications

that is more than 30 years old. Care-Tex Industries is a full-service dye-and-finishing facility specializing in GOTS-certified dyes and finishes that rely on non-pollutive chemicals including salt, vinegar and baking soda. S&B specializes in nontoxic, water-based printing and in-house digitizing.

UStrive developed a technology solution to ease the process of making organic clothing. It is scheduled to release in the first quarter of 2020 a tracking platform that will help other companies get involved in the sustainability game. The program is called UTrack, a cloud-based platform that will help track and verify where a brand sources its materials, where a garment was made and the types of chemicals used in making the garment.

David Dea, a technology executive and UStrive partner, directed the development of UTrack and worked with GOTS consultant Ely Battalen to confirm the GOTS guidelines when an organization is considering a company for certification.

UTrack monitors an item's completion date and creates a unique URL that shows when each step has been completed. The program also has the capability of including this informa-

tion within a QR code that a brand can add to its hangtags so it can provide transparency on the garment's journey from field to store.

Dea said that he took eight months to customize it to track GOTS information. He aimed to make UTrack user-friendly by incorporating interfaces that are similar to social media. Like social media, people using the system can receive live updates when colleagues work on the platform. People also can collaborate on the system in real time. Drawing tools and tech packs are connected within the system. There's also a single searchable library where flat sketches, technical drawings and product images can be placed.

UTrack was built to be shared, Wilson and Dea said. Wilson said that he hopes it will inspire other companies to give a rigorous audit to their sustainability plan. "But the tracking program can be used by anybody," Wilson said.

UStrive's services include sourcing organic hemp and cotton fabric. It offers a pattern and sample department, knits-and wovens-manufacturing capabilities, sublimation, direct-to-garment options and silk-screening.

The company also will not ship product in plastic poly bags; instead, it will use paper bags to ship products. UStrive has worked with consultant Derek Sabori, former vice president of sustainability at **Volcom**, the action-sports brand headquartered in Costa Mesa, Calif. He currently works as a speaker and consultant on sustainability issues, particularly cleaning up the apparel industry's reliance on poly-bag packaging.

Garik Himebaugh, founder of the Iowa City, Iowa-based marketplace for sustainable men's fashions **Eco-Stylist**, said that UStrive is making a much-needed contribution to sustainability.

"GOTS-certified factories that manufacture in the U.S. are quite rare, which is why I am especially excited to see manufacturers like UStrive taking a position of leadership and obtaining the certification," he said. "Not many clothing certifications cover the manufacturing process from raw materials all the way to the finished product like GOTS does." ●

## LEGAL

### New Laws *Continued from page 1*

aligned with new legislation.

"There are certainly increased burdens on employers in terms of liability and regulation, so it's very important that apparel companies have the audits of their current practices and compare them to new laws to make sure they are in compliance," he said. "I recommend speaking to a lawyer if they are smart, they have their own in-house counsel and should perform this audit."

While certain laws might be simple to follow and require only small changes within a business, others could force employers to overhaul their practices.

"It could involve redoing handbooks or an audit of the service providers," Renfro said.

Moving into 2020, apparel-industry businesses in California should note the passage and implementation of the following legislation.

#### Employment Status Law (AB 5)

Signed by Newsom in September, the Employment Status Law amends Section 3351 of and adds Section 2750.3 to the state's labor code, in addition to amending sections 606.5 and 621 of the Unemployment Insurance Code by considering contractors as employees, unless they meet the criteria of a three-factor—or ABC test—established in 2018 through the California Supreme Court decision regarding *Dynamex v. Superior Court*. Scheduled to be implemented Jan. 1, the law allows those who were formerly considered contractors and excluded from certain benefits, such as certain unemployment funds or healthcare, to access these resources. On the other hand, employers might reconsider the status of their employees or forego working with California-based contract workers.

"Part of what the legislature did was to codify and put into statute form what the California Supreme Court determined to be a test," Renfro said. "It has come to be known as the ABC test. Unless a statutory exemption applies, then the burden is on the hirer or employer to demonstrate that the employee or contractor is, in fact, a nonemployee or a contractor."

To fulfill the guidelines of the ABC test and be considered an independent contractor, workers must remain free from the control and direction of the business for which they



California Governor Gavin Newsom signs AB 5 on Sept 18.

work, which should be outlined in their contracts. The work performed by these professionals must include tasks that are outside the normal everyday business of the hiring entity. Finally, workers must be "customarily engaged" in the type of trade that is connected to the work they perform for the company with whom they are contracted.

#### Employment discrimination: limitation of actions (AB 9)

Expanding the time frame that an employee has to file a discrimination charge with the Department of Fair Employment and Housing, AB 9 was signed by Newsom on Oct. 10 and will be implemented Jan 1. Originally affording a one-year time line to employees who believe they have been harassed or discriminated against, the new law will extend this limit to three years.

#### Employment discrimination: enforcement (AB 51)

On Oct. 10, Newsom approved an addition of Section 12953 to the government code and Section 432.6 to the labor code, thereby prohibiting employers from requiring applicants from waiving any of their rights outlined by the Fair Employment and Housing Act. According to AB 51, employers are also prohibited from engaging in retaliation, discrimination, threatening or terminating an applicant from the employment-application process if the candidate refuses to consent to a waiver of their rights.

#### Settlement agreements: restraints in trade (AB 749)

Beginning Jan. 1, companies are forbidden to include in settlements with employees policies that prevent the rehire of persons who have accepted legal settlements against their employers. Signed by Newsom on Oct. 12, the bill also makes provisions for extraordinary circumstances that would permit employers to terminate or rely on a policy of not rehiring certain employees. These occurrences, judged on a case-by-case basis, include employees who have engaged in sexual harassment or sexual assault. Additionally, employers will not be forced to rehire a former employee if the reasons for bypassing the candidate are neither retaliatory nor discriminatory.

#### Piece-Rate Compensation (AB 1513)

AB 1513 originally was implemented in January 2016 to establish non-productive time compensation guidelines for workers who are reimbursed according to a piece-rate amount. For 2020, a new amendment has been added to Labor Code section 226.2, requiring the compensation of rest periods. This is separate from piece-rate compensation and, according to California's Department of Industrial Relations, must be determined by a figure that is the higher of either "an average hourly rate determined by dividing the total compensation for the workweek, exclusive of compensation for rest and recovery periods and any premium compensation for overtime, by the total hours worked during the workweek, exclusive of rest and recovery periods," or the appropriate minimum wage.

"Under Labor Code section 2673.1, garment workers who are not paid for all hours worked may file wage claims against the contractor who hired them, as well as the manufacturers whose garments they produced," according to the California Department of Industrial Relations.

#### Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review. Employment (SB 83)

Within this legislation, which was signed into law by Newsom on June 27 to be implemented July 1, paid family leave for new parents has been increased from six to eight weeks. This time afforded for parents to bond with newborn or newly adopted children can be taken in addition to the six weeks

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## LEGAL

### New Laws *Continued from page 3*

of post-childbirth recovery afforded under the state's disability-insurance program. This time frame has also been extended to employees who are caring for an ill family member.

#### Employees: lactation accommodation (SB 142)

Signed into law Oct. 10, SB 142 requires employers to provide a lactation room or comparable location that includes an accessible sink and refrigerator within close proximity to the workspace occupied by employees who are nursing mothers. The bill also requires employers to provide reasonable break time for employees who are nursing mothers to express milk. Employers with fewer than 50 employees are permitted to file an exemption due to extraordinary difficulty or expense. With the exemption, employers are still required to provide a private place to serve as a lactation space for employees who are nursing mothers.

#### Discrimination: hairstyles (SB 188)

Following its approval by Newsom on July 3, SB 188 amended Section 212.1 of the Education Code and Section 12926 of the Government Code. While FEHA protects employees from discrimination-based hiring, promotion and termination based on race, religious beliefs and sex, or perceptions stemming from these factors, SB 188 provides further protections. Expanding the definition of race, the law prohibits employers from discriminating against employees or candidates based on hair texture and styles such as braids, locks and twists.

#### Photoshoot Pay Easement Act (SB 671)

Amending the existing law that requires employers to pay wages to professionals hired to work on photo shoots upon completion of the project, SB 671 now allows employers to adhere to their regular payment schedule.

"[In the past,] if you hired a contractor for a print shoot then you had to pay at the termi-

nation of the project regardless of the company's practices," Renfro explained. "Now you can pay the employees or contractors on your next pay day."

Amending sections 203, 203.1 and 220 of and adding Section 201.6 to the labor code, this law was signed into law by Newsom on Sept. 5 and took effect immediately.

#### Employers sexual harassment training requirements (SB 778)

By Jan. 1, 2021, and every two years thereafter, employers with five or more employees will be required to offer two hours of classroom or interactive sexual-harassment training to supervisors within six months of assuming a management-level role. In addition to the education of supervisors, the bill, which was signed on Aug. 15 by Newsom, requires non-supervisory employees to engage in one hour of sexual-harassment training within six months of hire. Employers who have mandated training for employees after Jan. 1, 2019, are not required to provide additional training by the Jan. 1, 2020 deadline but must do so after two years have passed.

#### Minimum Wage

Though the law regulating minimum wage increases was implemented in January 2017, the scale of increases in wages will still affect companies in 2020. As of Jan. 1, the California minimum wage for employers with 25 employees or fewer will increase from \$11 to \$12 per hour. Those businesses with 26 employees or more must adhere to an increase from \$12 to \$13 per hour.

While many of the new laws will take effect Jan. 1, it is important to note that the date of implementation could vary by location, according to city or county.

"In California, minimum wage is going up," explained California Department of Industrial Relations Public Information Officer Paola Laverde. "In Los Angeles, L.A. county and the city, the wages change July 1."

The increase is the latest change to California's minimum wage, as the rate each year with an ultimate goal of implementing a statewide figure of \$15 per hour by 2023. ●

## Calendar

### Jan. 4

**London Fashion Week Mens**  
Store Studios  
London  
Through Jan. 6

### Trendz

Palm Beach County Convention Center  
Palm Beach, Fla.  
Through Jan. 6

### Jan. 5

**Accessorie Circuit**  
**Accessories The Show**  
**Fame**  
**Intermezzo Collections**  
**Moda**  
**NY Women's**  
Javits Center  
New York  
Through Jan. 7

### The Trends Show

Phoenix Convention Center  
Phoenix  
Through Jan. 7

### Jan. 8

**Surf Expo, Bluewater at Surf Expo**  
Orange County Convention Center  
Orlando, Fla.  
Through Jan. 10

### Jan. 12

**LA Kids Market**  
California Market Center  
Los Angeles  
Through Jan. 15  
**LA Market Week**  
California Market Center,  
The New Mart, Cooper Design  
Space, Gerry Building,  
Lady Liberty Building,

Primrose Design Building  
Through Jan. 15

### Jan. 13

**Brand Assembly**  
Cooper Design Space  
Los Angeles  
Through Jan. 15

### Designers and Agents

The New Mart  
Los Angeles  
Through Jan. 15

There's more  
on ApparelNews.net.

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

Submissions to the calendar should be emailed to the Calendar Editor at calendar@apparelnews.net. 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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# Nusumeria Finds New Opportunities in Hemp

By Andrew Asch *Retail Editor*

When Jon Flaks launched his Los Angeles–headquartered brand **Nusumeria** on **Instagram** in July 2019, he forecasted that he was going to sell styles to people looking to complete their athleisure wardrobes. The response that came next was a pleasant surprise.

Within days of posting pictures of duffel bags and slim-fit hoodies on the Instagram profile *@nusumeria*, he got regular inquiries from yoga studios and CBD-oil brands. These companies wanted to know if Flaks, who was new to the apparel business, could create private-label clothing for them and put their logos on his hoodies and duffel bags.

“I never planned to do any private label,” Flaks said. “Day after day, I was getting approached by two to three companies because I was one of the only people making hemp sportswear.”

He currently estimates that half of his business is private label, while general consumers make up the other half.

Flaks had been selling what he said was 55 percent hemp, 45 percent organic-cotton hoodies. These pieces are embraced by consumers who are looking for an alternative option from more-mainstream fabrics that have been critiqued as being manufactured in ways that hurt the environment.

Sustainability is a serious concern for Flaks, but his interest in hemp fabric stemmed from a different reason. The characteristics of hemp afford a better martial-arts uniform.

Flaks teaches mixed martial arts, but after a day of teaching people how to throw a proper punch and to disarm an opponent he wanted to dump his uniforms. He considered the uniform fabric uncomfortable, and body odors proved difficult to eliminate with simple washing. This inspired Flaks’s hunt for something new by researching fabrics and materials, which is how he found hemp.

For Flaks, the material provided all the benefits that the traditional uniform fabric did not. It was soft, durable, and he considered it hygienic as the material didn’t hold onto germs and odors.

Flaks was interested in making a bespoke hemp martial-arts uniform, but the cost was daunting, and he decided



against it. He continued to instruct in a standard uniform, but he wanted to start a new business, and he didn’t forget about hemp. He forecasted that there would be an opening for hemp wear in sportswear and athleisure.

“Hemp brands have a very outdated, somewhat of a hippie look,” Flaks said. Those who loved the fabric would probably be looking for something new, he thought.

He invested his savings into developing a line that would mix new styles and an ancient material. It was the inspiration for the brand name Nusumeria, which mixes the word “new” and the name of Sumer, which is often considered the cradle of human civilization and is located in modern-day Iraq.

His work with the patternmaker he chose to design the hoodies allowed Flaks to manufacture the styles in Los Angeles. The hoodies retail for \$90 and are sold to the public on the direct-to-consumer channel [www.nusumeria.com](http://www.nusumeria.com).

Flaks’s label started a little after some big changes took

place in the hemp market. While sales of hemp goods have always been legal in America, the cultivation of hemp was only legalized in the U.S. in 2018 with the passage of the Farm Bill, but Flaks and many other hemp brands continue to source hemp fabric from overseas.

The eventual domestic sourcing for the fiber is going to develop, and this type of fabric will grow in popularity, said Rob Jungmann, founder of **Jungmaven**, a label that includes clothing made using the fiber. Jungmann has been in the hemp-fabric business since 1992, and he is bullish about its future.

“It’s coming out of the niche market. I see more companies putting it into their products,” said Jungmann, whose brand makes T-shirts and fleece. But he forecasted hemp would find more uses.

“We’re going to see more hemp blends coming out,” he said. “We might see it being blended into wovens.” ●



## SUSTAINABILITY



# Washed Ashore Reaches Sustainable Goals

By Dorothy Crouch *Managing Editor*

After four years of working to build the most sustainable jewelry brand possible, **Washed Ashore** founder Larada Lamsam achieved her most important goal for the luxury-jewelry line. Launched in 2015, the Los Angeles-based company experienced a rebrand in May as Lamsam celebrated her accomplishment.

“We rebranded in May because I was able to achieve 100 percent sustainability. It took four years, and finally we did it,” she said. “Sustainability has always been the core value at Washed Ashore, but it was difficult to find the raw materials or manufacturers to reach those goals.”

Originally from Thailand, now located in Los Angeles, the entrepreneur considers herself a global citizen. Her California brand relies on sourcing recycled gold, silver and reclaimed gemstones from her home country, a first for her brand with the release of her latest collection, Dara. A local pawn shop serves as the source of her gemstones, which are taken from existing pieces of jewelry that are disassembled, while her manufacturer provides the recycled metals.

“This is our first collection in four years to work in gemstones,” she said. “I was leery to work with gemstones because I feel strongly about illegal mining. I decided to do this collection because I was able to work with post-consumer gems.”

While she realizes the importance of reducing the impact on the climate that results from sourcing worldwide, Lamsam offsets her carbon footprint through a partnership with the **Carbon Fund Foundation**. Through sustainable sourcing and ethical manufacturing, Lamsam is extending a hand to form business partnerships with other female entrepreneurs around the globe, including her manufacturing partner, who is based in Thailand.

“Our manufacturer is a female-founded company, and the founder’s husband works for her. He is from Italy, so [products are] Italian grade, and they are able to manufacture meticulously made pieces,” she explained. “We manufacture overseas, but everyone is well paid. I stress the value of a global economy.”

In addition to recycled metals and reclaimed gemstones, certain Washed Ashore pieces also include pearls, but these materials are sustainable and ethical. The Akoya Keshi pearls are dead stock that is upcycled by Lamsam, who prefers their naturally irregular shape, which yields a unique design to every piece.

“Our core collection and my love of the

ocean led us to use pearls,” she said. “The process of how the pearls are taken is small and not mass produced.”

It is Lamsam’s love for the planet’s oceans that inspires her work. Her goal to become a completely sustainable company led Lamsam to also invest in sourcing sustainable packaging for her products, a mission close to her heart considering the negative impact of poly-bag packaging on the world’s oceans. Washed Ashore’s new packaging is made from recycled paper and cotton. The zipper pouches in which the pieces are sold are sourced in the United States from domestically grown, recycled cotton.

“We are working toward green shipping,” she said. “Reuse, repurpose and recycle is definitely this generation’s mantra.”

Along with their orders, customers who bought Washed Ashore goods during the company’s relaunch received another ecologically sustainable surprise. Through a partnership with the Tahiti-based nonprofit **Coral Gardeners**, Washed Ashore adopted 100 coral reefs located on the Tahitian coast. Upon receipt of their purchases, customers also received an adoption certificate that showed the coordinates where reefs adopted in their names are located.

“We ended up having a relationship with them. My production manager, Teipo Tematahotoa, is from Tahiti, and these guys at Coral Gardeners are hands-on,” Lamsam explained. “They physically put the coral down there to grow. We have the same values to protect what we love.”

The investments in sustainability that Lamsam has made are now gaining worldwide recognition. The United Kingdom-based luxury goods-industry watchdog agency **Positive Luxury** recently awarded its Butterfly Mark to Washed Ashore, a sign that the brand is not only doing something right but is working to do everything in its power to promote the greater good.

“We were honored to get the award and Butterfly Mark,” Lamsam explained. “They are U.K. based and work with luxury brands that meet their standards for the planet. They are big on encouraging a global economy.”

In addition to its direct-to-consumer channel, [washedashore.com](http://washedashore.com), which serves as the primary source of business, Washed Ashore is also sold through retail partners including **Wolf & Badger** and **Reve En Vert**. During the holiday season, the brand has enjoyed retail partnerships with **Fred Segal’s West Hollywood**, Calif., location and **Four Seasons Ko Olina** and **Four Seasons Hualalai** in Hawaii. Wholesale price points range from \$33.50 to \$792.50. ●

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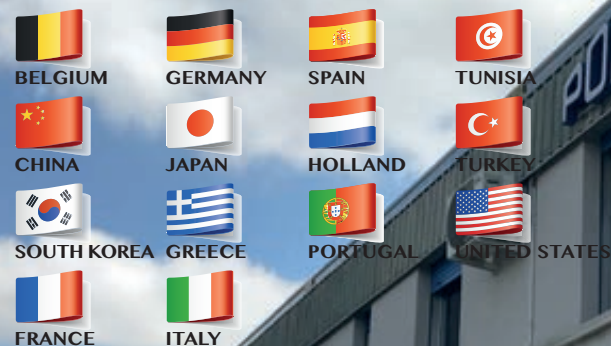
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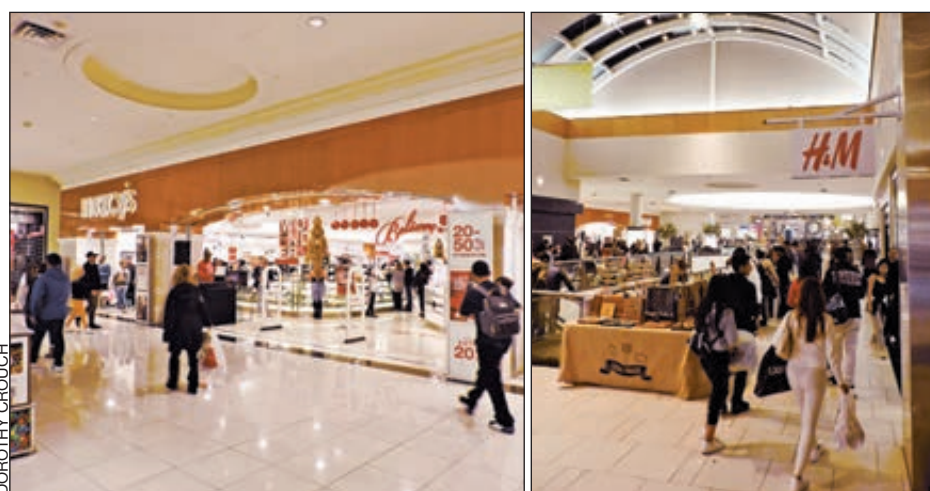
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**Holiday** *Continued from page 1*

son's holiday-sales results showed that omni-channel shopping took on increased importance, said Steve Sadove, a senior adviser for Mastercard and former chief executive officer and chairman of **Saks Inc.**

"E-commerce sales hit a record high this year with more people doing their holiday shopping online," Sadove said. "Due to a later-than-usual Thanksgiving holiday, we saw retailers offering omni-channel sales earlier in the season, meeting consumers' demand for the best deals across all channels and devices."

E-commerce sales were robust for jewelry and electronics. These categories respectively rose 8.8 percent and 10.7 percent during the season.

Forecasts for the recent holiday season identified growth within e-commerce sales. An October survey released by the **National Retail Federation** trade group found that 56 percent of consumers said that they would shop online during the holiday season. People from every age group increased their shopping, according to an NRF podcast that was released Dec. 9. It found that there was an uptick in e-shopping for consumers 55 and over and even with consumers age 65 and older. Counterintuitively, the NRF podcast found that consumers under the age of 25 developed a greater interest in shopping in bricks-and-mortar stores during the holiday season.

Digital shopping has long been a big competitor to physical retail and specialty retailers, but during holiday 2019 the competition became even more formidable, said Bob Abdel, a partner and buyer for **Jack's Surfboards** in Huntington Beach, Calif. The influential surf-and-action-sports retailer runs eight full-price locations in Southern California as well as its e-commerce site, [www.jackssurfboards.com](http://www.jackssurfboards.com).

"We had to compete heavily with our suppliers," he said of the direct-to-consumer sites run by brands. "Everyone had sales on their sites."

But Jack's brand equity and its history serving surfers and action-sports enthusiasts for more than 60 years attracted people to its physical shops.

"We are very lucky to be who we are," Abdel said. "We carry a big selection, and everything was in our favor."

He reported a pace of business that was similar to past holiday seasons. There was heavy consumer traffic five days before Christmas. While many retailers experience a lull before the last stretch of holiday business, Abdel said that his stores were generally busy.

A gamble on weather also worked out well for Jack's. In October, it opened **Jack's Snowboard Shop** in Huntington Beach, just before heavy winter storms left a lot of ski-and-snowboard resorts across California blanketed with snow.

A lot of opportunity remains for bricks-and-mortar boutiques despite an increase in e-commerce, said Kevin Frank, co-owner of

the **K. Frank** boutique in Montecito, Calif. However, boutique retailers have to make a deep dive into the tastes and shopping interests of the people who live near their shops.

"Retailers have to do a better job of being aware of what local customers want and tailor goods to their clientele," he said. "It's an advantage that doesn't go away. Online can be overwhelming. There are almost too many choices. People are finding security coming to a store that is well selected without sifting through an overwhelming amount of choices." Consumer traffic was busy throughout the holiday season at his shop, Frank said.

Economic forecasts across the board had predicted a strong holiday season. **Deloitte**, a major auditing-and-consulting firm, forecasted a 4.5 to 5 percent increase in retail sales for holiday 2019. It also predicted a 14 to 18 percent increase in e-commerce sales during the season.

The NRF predicted that holiday retail sales would grow from 3.8 percent to 4.2 percent over the 2018 holiday season. The NRF also forecasted that U.S. retailers would make between \$727.9 billion and \$730.7 billion. Sales for digital retailers were predicted to increase between 11 and 14 percent.

Trade wars with China created tension in the economy in 2019, but the overall picture in the American economy supported a forecast for strong holiday sales, said Matthew Shay, the NRF's president and chief executive officer.

"The U.S. economy is continuing to grow, and consumer spending is still the primary engine behind that growth," Shay said in October. The U.S. unemployment rate was at historic lows throughout the 2019 fourth quarter, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. In October, unemployment was 3.6 percent across the nation. In November, unemployment declined to 3.5 percent.

Consumer confidence was relatively high throughout the season, said Jack Kleinhenz, the NRF's chief economist. "Consumers still feel very good with money in their pockets," he said.

Separate from Mastercard's post-Christmas sales wrap-up, the NRF will announce the results of holiday 2019 sales on Jan. 16, which will contain further economic data not immediately available the day after Christmas.

The strong U.S. economy managed to overcome what many considered a major handicap to the 2019 holiday season. Because Thanksgiving was later in November than in 2018, there were six fewer shopping days in holiday 2019 compared to the previous year.

During the 2019 holiday season, record numbers of shoppers—189.6 million Americans—shopped during Black Friday Weekend, which reflected a 14 percent increase in shoppers compared to the previous year, according to the NRF. The Super Saturday weekend before Christmas also was forecasted to be big. The NRF forecasted that 148 million Americans planned to shop, an increase over 134.3 million the previous year. ●



# Ruti to Create AI Stylist

By Andrew Asch Retail Editor

Retail marketing and back-office tasks are increasingly informed by big data and machine learning. Boutique retailers will soon find out if artificial intelligence can make savvy styling recommendations for shoppers.

**Ruti**, headquartered in the San Francisco Bay Area town of Belmont, Calif., recently announced that it had raised \$6 million in a Series A funding led by **Viola Ventures**, based in Herzliya, Israel. The investment will fund new retail locations. It also will bankroll the development of a proprietary AI platform that will develop recommendations for individual customers. The platform may be available at eight bricks-and-mortar Ruti locations as well as on its digital channel, [ruti.com](http://ruti.com).

The platform will mix an individual customer's fashion likes and dislikes, as well as information based on past purchases and items a customer has tried on. It will use facial recognition as well as customer relationships-management technology, said Sharon Segev, Ruti's chief technology officer.

"This funding will be used to bring the high-touch experience of our in-store experience to our online store. The traditional e-commerce approach might work for high-frequency, low-cost items, but when it comes to unique products and truly personal customer relationships, we knew we had to develop a better approach," Segev said when the investment was recently announced.

Daniel Cohen, a general partner in Viola, said that the investment in Ruti would help it grow in a retail market that



Ruti boutique on Los Angeles' Abbot Kinney Boulevard

is increasingly powered by omni-channel shopping, which mixes digital and bricks-and-mortar shopping.

"The future of strong retail brands will be a personalized shopping experience that is consistent, both online and offline. In today's world, the offline shopping experience is lagging dramatically compared with e-commerce," he said in a blog last month. "In fact, in most stores today, the consumer is not identified until they reach the cashier at the end of the purchase funnel. Ruti has built a proprietary CRM with built-in facial recognition in order to create a truly personalized

in-store experience."

The mix of fashion design and AI is something that companies are experimenting with, said Judah Phillips, founder of the machine-learning-as-a-service firm **Squark**, based in Burlington, Mass. It can be considered as hyper-personalization marketing, he said.

"Instead of walking into a store and randomly searching racks, you can have a clerk suggest through AI predictions what styles and items you might like," Phillips said. This information can also be sent to a customer through his or her device. "Machine learning and AI personalization are something that more and more companies will be doing in the future."

Currently, academics and companies with deep pockets do research into the intersection of fashion and machine-learning systems called generative adversarial networking.

Phillips said that a fashion generative adversarial networking system (GANS) could mix a consumer's fashion likes, along with what styles are trending on social media. The machine-learning network then could possibly create a new design.

"You could create new versions of shoes, dresses or shirts that have never been seen before," Phillips explained. "They will be blends of things you like and current styles."

In the near future, consumers could be able to work with machine systems to create these designs and then send the designs to manufacturers to produce. Phillips recently started a company, **Generatable.com**, that will provide a GANS system to allow consumers to design and produce their own clothing. ●

## OBITUARY

# Ted Houston, Polygon Solutions, 52

Ted Houston, president of Long Beach, Calif.-based **Polygon Solutions**, which provides management solutions for apparel and fashion brands, died Dec. 23 at **Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center**. The cause of death was a fungal infection that had set in more than four months after a successful double-lung transplant.

Houston led a full, active life during which he worked with several prominent fashion companies, including premium-denim brand **Rock & Republic**, **C&C California** and **Re/Done**. He

frequently ran marathons and also served as a police officer for the **Torrance Police Department** from 1989 to 1995. He started a career working with fashion companies as a management consultant.

Friends said that he was known for excelling at athletics and leadership. "He was a stud athlete," said Ivan Arnold, a friend and a co-founder and former chief executive officer of the art-driven retail brand **Tokidoki**. "He was a C-level guy who was so smart when it came to systems. He was

sought after by executives who want to grow their businesses. He would look at problems from a sales and a logistics perspective and help brands build great businesses."

Houston also served on the board of the apparel-business fashion-education group **Fashion Business Inc.** Survivors include his wife, Faye; children Matthew and Haleigh; and stepchildren Jack and Kate. Details for funeral services were not available by press time.

—A.A.



Ted Houston

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## Jobs Available

**GRADER/MARKER MAKER**  
 Karen Kane, Inc., a Los Angeles based women's clothing manufacturer, is looking to add to our marking & grading team.  
 Immediate opening for an experienced Grader/Marker Maker.  
**Job Responsibilities Include:**  
 Must be proficient in Gerber version 10 as well as Word and Excel.  
 Grading required for sportswear, special construction, tops, dresses, pants and jackets.  
 Create markers for best material utilization on different fabrics – solid, stripe and placement – both knit & woven.  
 Calculate yields for costing.  
**Candidate Requirements:**  
 Strong sense of urgency.  
 Must be able to work independently as well as part of a team.  
 Attention to detail.  
 Min 3-4 yrs experience.  
 Must be Bilingual English/Spanish.  
 Benefits include: medical, dental, vision, life insurance, 401k, sick time, vacation, holidays.  
 Fax resume to: 323-277-6830 or email to: [resumes@karenkane.com](mailto:resumes@karenkane.com)

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# HAPPY HOLIDAYS

Wishing you peace, joy, and prosperity throughout the coming year. Thank you for your continued support and partnership. We look forward to working with you in 2020.



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