

# CALIFORNIA ApparelNews

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## FROM TEE TO GREEN

After debuting at the recent Los Angeles Art Hearts Fashion, Mac Divot, the iconic comic strip that ran for 22 years in some 200 papers nationwide, was revived by Tom Keefer and Cindy Ingraham-Keefer into a new line. Combining unique intellectual property with sustainable apparel manufacturing, it mixes retro with modern.

For more looks, see page 3.

### RETAIL

## Optimism and Resilience Define Retailers' Post-Thanksgiving Strategies

By Christian Chensvold, Dorothy Crouch and Kelli Freeman

It's the most exciting time of the year in retail as stores make their final pushes to reach their end-of-year sales goals during the winding down of 2023. The official kickoff to the holiday season was in full swing with festive decorations and fabulous offerings within some of the most popular California shopping areas from Los Angeles to Sonoma County.

The past year in retail has yielded more than a few challenges as brazen thefts and tightened consumer spending due to financial hurdles, including inflation and high credit-card interest rates, have negatively impacted the industry. However, there has also been much optimism as the year comes to a close. The **National Retail Federation** has forecasted that consumers will spend between \$957.3 billion and \$966.6 billion during the 2023 holiday season—a 3 to 4 percent increase

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### INDUSTRY VOICES

## An Opportunity for Greater Opportunity Around the World—Through Smart Trade

By Beth Hughes AAFA vice president, trade and customs policy

For the past decade in particular, U.S. apparel and footwear companies have been intensely focused on sourcing diversification. As U.S.-China and related geopolitical tensions increase, the momentum is even stronger.

Now (and yesterday) is the time for companies to make investments beyond their traditional trading partners.

In fact, recent industry surveys indicate that countries in the Western Hemisphere are of interest for more investment. Africa and the U.S. provide investment opportunities too.

Trade offers so many benefits at home and around the

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### INSIDE

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

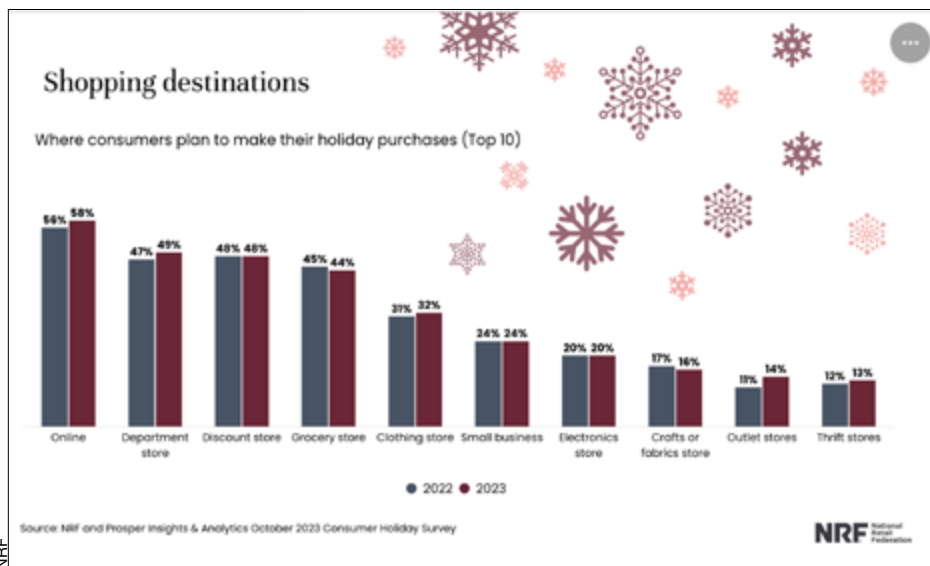
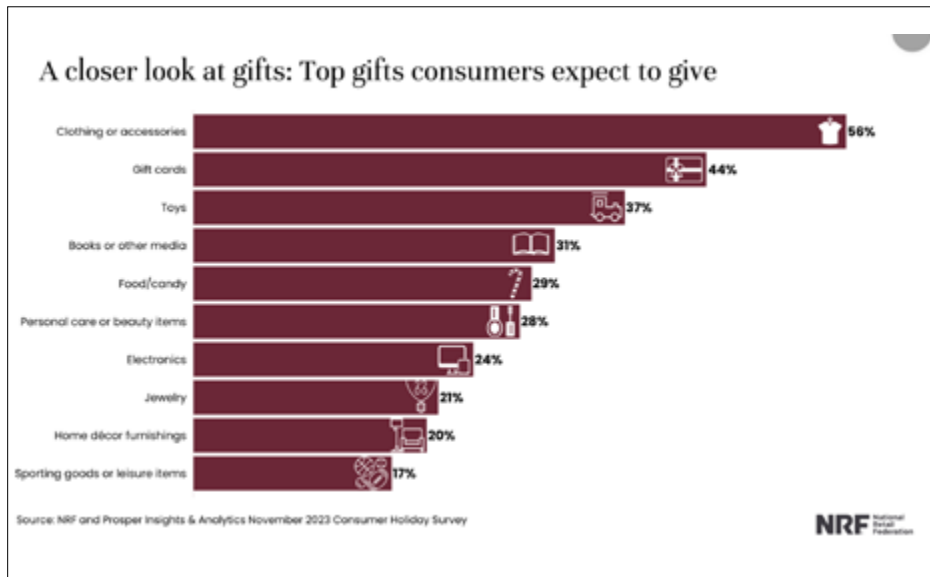


NRF Thanksgiving retail report ... page 2

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# NRF Releases Initial Thanksgiving Holiday Shopping Report



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From phenomenal to lackluster, retailers recount differing experiences over the long Thanksgiving shopping weekend. That's where the **National Retail Federation** steps in with big-picture stats and numbers that put everything in perspective.

"The five-day period between Thanksgiving and Cyber Monday reflects the continued resilience of consumers and strength of the economy," said NRF President and CEO Matthew Shay in a report released this week in partnership with **Prosper Insights & Analytics**. "Shoppers exceeded our expectations with a robust turnout."

A record 200.4 million consumers shopped over the five-day holiday weekend, surpassing last year's record of 196.7 million and the NRF's initial expectations of 182 million shoppers. Consumers utilized both online and in-store channels throughout the weekend, with 121.4 million people visiting physical retail locations. Online shoppers totaled 134.2 million, up from 130.2 million last year.

Black Friday continued its streak as the most popular day for in-store shopping, with 76.2 million shoppers opting to visit bricks-and-mortar locations. About 59 million consumers shopped in stores on the Saturday after Thanksgiving, down from 63.4 million last year. On par with last year, 78 percent of consumers shopped specifically for Small Business Saturday. Consistent with last year, about 44 million consumers used their home desktop or laptop to shop online on Cyber Monday, while another 40.5 million shopped online using their mobile devices, down from a record 45.7 million in 2022 but still well above pre-pandemic levels. Forty-nine percent of those surveyed said they purchased clothing and accessories.

"Over the course of the weekend, consumers were able to find great deals on holiday gifts and other items they wanted," Prosper Executive Vice President of Strategy Phil Rist said. Retailers have continued to respond to earlier holiday demand with sales and promotions throughout the season, the report said.

NRF defines the holiday season as Nov. 1 through Dec. 31 and has forecast that holiday spending is expected to reach record levels and will grow between 3 and 4 percent, totaling between \$957.3 billion and \$966.6 billion.—*Christian Chensvold*



Matthew Shay, National Retail Federation president and CEO

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## Inside the Industry

**Jesta I.S.** has unveiled advanced features to its unified commerce Omni Store Platform. These will enable retail brands to better integrate their omni-channel data, internal departments and operational processes with new and powerful unified technology. "This will allow brands to deliver seamless, omni-channel experiences consistently, the company said, "establishing themselves as innovators in a hyper-crowded space and becoming a go-to destination for the shopping experiences that digital consumers have come to expect." The updated platform "creates frictionless and immersive shopping experiences for today's digital consumers who want to browse and purchase online," said Jesta I.S. President Arvind Gupta, "and then pick up in store or purchase an omni-channel gift card in store but have it sent directly to a loved one complete with a thoughtful message and nice packaging."

**Artistic Milliners** and **Lenzing** have introduced a collection of denim fabrics made from Tencel's newest fiber, 32MM, which are optimized to create the authentic look of a classic pair of jeans but without compromising on comfort. The 32MM fiber is shorter in length than traditional Tencel, giving it better compatibility with cotton by allowing it to blend with shorter fibers. "The resulting product offers the great highs and lows of cotton," said the company, "providing an authentic look and better wash-downs but with an extraordinary level of softness and an unexpectedly silky hand feel." Omer Ahmed, managing director of Artistic Milliners, said, "Circularity is part of our central mission, just as it is for Lenzing, but both companies are also passionate about creating beautiful, comfortable products."

**YKK** has announced the release of its new DynaPel water-repellent zipper, designed to be compatible with garment-recycling systems. DynaPel uses EMPEL technology instead of the standard PU film to achieve its water repellency. The lack of a PU film helps remove one of the barriers of textile-to-textile recycling of performance apparel by eliminating the urethane material, which presents challenges to garment-recycling processes. Conventional chemical and mechanical garment-recycling systems cannot process the polyurethane film commonly used on water-repellent zippers, necessitating the removal of zippers from garments before recycling. This additional processing step often deters recyclers from accepting garments with PU zippers, resulting in unnecessary waste. "DynaPel represents a new generation of sustainable, high-performance, water-repellent zippers," the company said. "It is the future of water protection for zippers."

# Fashion Techworks Revives the Iconic Comic Strip Mac Divot

By Christian Chensvold Associate Editor

No matter how well you play golf, the learning curve never ends. Sandy Mac Divot certainly knew that, which is how—as the hero of his own comic strip—he was able to deliver entertaining instruction on the game five days a week for 22 years. From the '50s through the '70s, the comic ran in the sports pages of 200 newspapers across the country, becoming a veritable mascot of the golfing industry. Now Mac Divot and his stylish entourage are making a comeback thanks to a special caretaker of intellectual property.

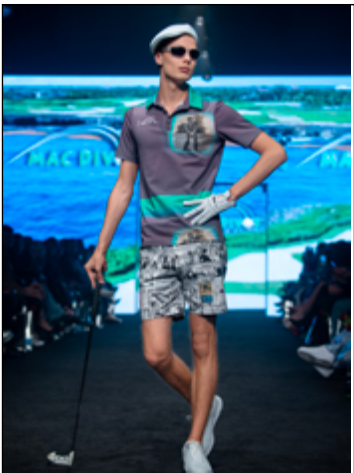
The *California Apparel News* caught up with the duo behind the brand's rollout: Tom Keefer, who is also general manager of **The New Mart** in downtown Los Angeles, and Cindy Ingraham-Keefer, founder and CEO of **Fashion Techworks**, who is serving as **Mac Divot's** creative director.

**CAN:** Tom, you have a very personal connection to this brand.

**TK:** Yes, I grew up as my father, Mel, illustrated the comic strip. He passed away a year and a half ago, and I made him a promise to relaunch the strip one way or another, and I have great ambitions for how it can translate into a number of products in apparel, publishing and other forms. From Nike to Penguin, there's not a lot you can do with a golf polo, but our concept is to integrate the actual art into fabric to create absolutely unique intellectual property that is both retro and contemporary in terms of style.

**CAN:** Why launch the clothing now? Why wasn't it done before?

**TK:** I actually started working on it 15 years ago in anticipation that some day the opportunity might arise, and I just think where we're at now is deeply into the fashion industry. Cindy and I are very proud of our accomplishments with Fashion Techworks, where we're very committed to sustainable apparel manufacturing. And along the way we've learned how to conceptualize, design and produce apparel. That's a relatively new skillset for me personally and a catalyst for launching the line.



MAC DIVOT

Sustainability is a key aspect of the Mac Divot line, which is sourced in Southern California, produced using Kornit technology to produce fabric designed by Cindy Ingraham-Keefer and Tom Keefer, with very little eco footprint.

**CK:** We'll be using Mac Divot as an example for others of the sustainable practices we've developed at Fashion Techworks while having fun creating it. What I really enjoy is starting with the black-and-white line art and making designs that will really look beautiful on fabric and the people wearing it. That was my main objective—to make beautiful pieces that people will love to wear.

**CAN:** Given the whimsical quality of the images and concept, where will the beauty come from?

**CK:** In the Mac Divot story line, they actually create apparel in the later years, and in the strip all the men and women were dressed at the height of style. Mel was a scholar of the style and culture of the moment, and he himself was extremely stylish, so I want this to be a line that he would be proud of and want to wear.

**CAN:** You recently unveiled Mac Divot in October during LA Fashion Week. What was that like?

**CK:** It was fantastic seeing these looks come together and then be seen in the scenario of Art Hearts Fashion at the

Majestic Theater. Their event is so dynamic and exciting, and it was an honor to have a sports line included in the schedule.

**CAN:** And where are you now with the launch?

**TK:** We're taking it one step at a time, with the website *macdivot.com* and then a direct-to-consumer Shopify account to open up engagement. But we want to be sustainable, and the fact that it can be sourced here in Southern California and produced using Kornit technology to produce fabric that we're designing ourselves with very little eco footprint is very important to us.

**CAN:** Golfwear is highly competitive, but it sounds like you're confident this iconic character can make a comeback and carry you forward.

**CK:** We're not going out and buying fabric, so this is very unique. And a lot of the womenswear transfers to tennis, and there's also what to wear to dinner after playing, and we want to continue to develop that so it's not just what you wear on the court or course but long dresses you can wear in the club afterward. ●

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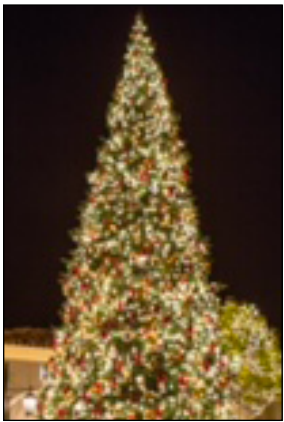


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## HOLIDAY STREET SCENE



# Los Angeles' Major Shopping Destinations Welcome the Winter Holidays

Many of Los Angeles' most popular retail centers held events throughout November to mark the beginning of the 2023 holiday season. Hosted ahead of the post-Thanksgiving shopping weekend, these events included the unveiling of decorative holiday displays, concerts and, of course, the arrival of Santa Claus for his seasonal mall visits.

On Nov. 11, the **Citadel Outlets** in Commerce, Calif., hosted its 22nd annual tree lighting and concert, hosted by J Rand of "American Idol." The roster of performers included Pentatonix, actor Nayah Damesen, FUTUREPOP

and the **Orange County School of the Arts MONTAGE**. In preparation for the holidays, the retail center also unveiled its 36-foot-wide, 21-foot-tall glittering red gift bow perched atop the Citadel wall with 75-foot-long tails streaming down the castle.

Under the theme of "Up Up and Away Holiday!," Beverly Hills, Calif.'s, Rodeo Drive hosted its holiday lighting celebration on Nov. 16. The event included entertainment on three stages with a performance by **Emmy Award**-winning actor and singer Sheryl Lee Ralph, in addition to appearances

by Ty Taylor, The Maccabeats and Love Actually Live by The Wallis. The **Beverly Hills High School** marching band led a procession that ended with the arrival of Santa Claus, who entered on one of the city's fire trucks. The night ended with a spectacular fireworks finale to excite visitors for the beginning of the holiday season.

Additional holiday celebrations took place at **The Grove** on Nov. 13, **South Coast Plaza** on Nov. 16, **The Promenade at Westlake** and **Santa Monica Place** on Nov. 17, and **The Americana at Brand** on Nov. 18.—*Dorothy Crouch*



**Black Friday** *Continued from page 1*

over 2022.

From the bustling outlet malls of Southern California to Northern California wine-country cool, *California Apparel News* tracked the consumer retail trends that made an impression over the post-Thanksgiving weekend.

**Beverly Hills-style holidays**

While most retailers rely on the last four to six weeks of the year to bring in the bulk of their sales revenue, the city of Beverly Hills, Calif., is unique. Extravagant big-ticket offerings from **Rolls-Royce** and **Rolex**, **Harry Winston** and **Tiffany**, and **Gucci** and **Louis Vuitton** are always in high demand.

Foot traffic was heavy on the famed Rodeo Drive during Black Friday. The year-round luxury shopping and tourist destination of Beverly Hills offered lavish shopping experiences on the retail menu rather than Black Friday bargain hunting.

“Sales numbers are back to pre-pandemic amounts,” said Todd Johnson, president and CEO of the **Beverly Hills Chamber of Commerce**.

People lined up early to get into streetwear fashion brand **Kith** at **Two Rodeo Shops** as well as **Maison Goyard** on Rodeo Drive.

This year’s sweet spot for stocking stuffers and holiday entertaining was the **Sweet Angeles** café and bakery, which opened at the **Rodeo Collection** on Oct. 17.

In addition to the world-class shopping, there was plenty of holiday excitement in Beverly Hills from city-wide decorations, nightly searchlight and 3D shows at city hall, carolers and events.

“We’re excited for people to come see us. All are welcome, and I think everyone will walk away with a wow factor,” said Johnson.

**Festive window dressing at Westfield Century City**

The **Westfield Century City** mall in Los Angeles saw significantly more traffic compared to last year, with shoppers eager to get their hands on luxury items and take advantage of Black Friday deals.

“We know that a lot of the stores have been running their specials for some time, but today is when you feel the energy; people are out there to experience the holidays,” said Louis Schillace, general manager of Westfield Century City. “It’s a good pace to see the customers coming through here, and they’re really enjoying it versus in years past where it may have been more hectic.”

Technology and toy stores like **Lego** were busy while Gen Zers waited patiently to get their hands on Australia-based clothing brand **Princess Polly**.

Eveningwear was proving to be very popular this year as consumers embraced occasions that call for dressing up and going out.

“People are starting to get together again and have parties in ways they haven’t in years past, so I am excited to see that people are getting things to wear for a night out [or] holiday parties,” said Schillace, who noted this trend reflected in window displays from **Bloomingdale’s**, **COS (Collection of**

**Style)**, **Macy’s**, **Reiss London** and **Zara**.

In addition to its Holiday Market, live performances and snowfall, Schillace was excited to share the latest experiences at the mall such as the new **American Girl** flagship store and the well-received “’Tis the Grinch Holiday Talk Show” and experience.

**Shopping around the clock at The Citadel**

Jumpstarting its holiday-shopping season early, Commerce, Calif.’s **Citadel Outlets** welcomed shoppers at 8 p.m. on Nov. 23, Thanksgiving night, at select retailers including the **Adidas**, **Calvin Klein**, **Dodgers Clubhouse**, **Guess**, **Kate Spade**, **Lacoste**, **Michael Kors**, **Movado**, **Sunglass Hut**, **Tilly’s** and the **U.S. Polo Assn** stores.

All retailers were open bright and early at 6 a.m. on Black Friday to join the all-night, 27-hour shopping party, which ended when the center closed at 11 p.m. on Nov. 24, with extended hours through the weekend. By inviting shoppers to visit the center early, Citadel management expected the jump on post-Thanksgiving sales would support tenants as they tried to achieve their goals during the final quarter of 2023.

“Every year at Citadel Outlets we host an exciting Black Friday spectacle for families and shoppers seeking out the steepest deals of the year heading into the holiday season,” said Manny Pereida, senior marketing manager of Citadel Outlets. “Our all-night shopping party started at 8 p.m., with many Citadel Outlets retailers opening their doors for a full 27 hours. Based off the size of crowds we saw this year, we’re confident that foot traffic will stay up throughout December and our retailers will reach their end-of-year sales goals.”

**Glimmers of hope for the holidays in San Francisco**

San Francisco’s recent crime and homelessness challenges have caused many top retailers to flee the city, but a noticeable police presence throughout the Black Friday weekend helped holiday revelers feel safe. The area’s Christmas tree and skating rink drew large crowds to Union Square, the city’s downtown shopping mecca.

If few were shopping, at least the mood was festive, according to one clerk who has worked for a decade at the square’s major department stores. Still, he said, shopping habits have been drastically altered by COVID-era cocooning.

“At first people didn’t want to come in, and while we’ve passed that stage, it’s still slow to come back,” he said on the condition of anonymity. With the rise of e-commerce and all the city’s problems, “it’s really a strange time.”

But shopping downtown is certainly better than the “doom spiral” that media reports would lead consumers to believe, said a manager of a major international luxury house located near the square.

“Families were out with strollers, and the streets were full of people. It was very positive to see people come downtown and patronize the city’s businesses,” said the manager, who requested to remain anonymous. “These glimmers of revenue hope planted seeds for the holiday shopping season.”

Since the high luxury sector doesn’t typically offer Black Friday discounts, most customers were browsing instead of buying. And while some shoppers requested shopping bags without any branding so as not to tempt thieves, the store manager noted, “The city is coming back, and there’s plenty

of protection for people to shop.”

Ten minutes from Union Square on blight-plagued Market Street stands the city’s largest indoor mall, **San Francisco Centre**, where owners **Westfield** and **Brookfield** stopped making payments on their \$558 million mortgage in June. In October a superior court judge appointed **Trident Pacific** as the mall’s new management.

Although foot traffic was noticeably scant by Sunday, flagship chains in the men’s sector reported better-than-expected sales over the Black Friday weekend. The closing of the center’s **Nordstrom** flagship department store has caused many customers to be unsure if the mall is even still open, said Sujata Shrestha, floor supervisor at **Zara Men**. “But we did pretty well despite people not coming to the city as much. It was more traffic than we expected, though compared to last year it’s still low. But people liked the deals, and our sales were good.”

At a major retailer, the manager of the men’s section said that while foot traffic was moderate, sales were phenomenal. “We had a great week overall. The quality of the shopping has actually been pretty high,” the manager, who requested anonymity, revealed. “We don’t operate in doom and gloom; the traffic is what it is, and we operate accordingly and are doing great.”

It was also a fantastic weekend for menswear at **H&M**, according to department manager Daniel Romero. “We’re happy about sales and doing really well. As long as the customer gets their money’s worth and we deliver the best service in the industry that’s what matters to us.”

**Heralding in a new era of NorCal retail experiences**

Many San Franciscans have moved 60 miles north to the town of Healdsburg, Calif., which has gone through rapid gentrification over the past decade. The city allows only independent retailers on its charming and historic town square, where there are some 16 apparel boutiques offering variations on wine-country casual.

Black Friday was “phenomenal” at **Bowdon Designs**, with shoppers grabbing accessories such as fingerless gloves by **Mademoiselle** before slowing down for the remainder of the weekend. Merete Wimmer’s two boutiques, **Refe** and **Ereloom**, were extremely busy in the days leading up to Thanksgiving, with **Michael Stars** and **Velvet** especially hot. “It’s nice when the brand recognition is there so we don’t need to explain them,” noted Wimmer.

At **Gathered Wildflowers**, a boho-inspired shop serving mothers and daughters, the weekend was merely “decent” compared to last year, said owner Cindy Holman, who was unsure what accounted for the difference. “I think people just have less money to spend,” said Holman.

At **Ooh La Luxe**, in business for 15 years, manager Selina Rodriguez said, “I think it’s been a good year considering all the economic things.” Standout items for the season included oversized cable-knit sweaters, which quickly sold out.

After years in business running the highly regarded Healdsburg boutique **Zizi**, owner Cynthia Zizzi still finds the holiday-shopping season unpredictable. “Traffic and sales were very good, up from last year,” she said, “but I’ve had this store for 26 years and I’ve still never figured out [the difference].” ●

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**AAFA** *Continued from page 1*

world, from economic and security improvements to quality of life and access to critical resources. That's why Congress needs to recognize that the same top-tier concerns in the areas of immigration and national security can be addressed significantly by trade around the world.

That's where you come in: a) U.S. residents (in California or wherever you may be reading from) and b) industry voices. YOUR members of Congress need to hear YOUR voices on smart trade. You are their constituents. You employ workers in their district or state. Pick your passion, and speak up with us:

**Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) and the Miscellaneous Tariff Bill (MTB)**

- The 34-month expiration of the GSP and MTB programs has left companies uncertain of their current and future investments.

- GSP promotes economic and sustainable development in developing countries by eliminating duties on thousands of products imported from 119 designated beneficiary countries, including travel goods.

- The MTB allows American companies the ability to eliminate or reduce duties on nearly 2,500 inputs and finished goods not available or manufactured in the United States.

- Further, the expiration of these programs that traditionally have bipartisan support only add doubt to the renewal of other soon-to-expire trade programs, like Haiti and the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA).

**Haiti HOPE/HELP**

- Haiti is going through one of its worst crises ever. We have an incredible opportuni-



Beth Hughes, vice president, trade and customs policy, at the American Apparel & Footwear Association

ty right now to take advantage of the sourcing diversification that is going on in the industry to encourage some of that trade and investment to Haiti.

- However, if Haiti HOPE/HELP are not renewed well prior to the September 2025 expiration, companies will begin to shift their sourcing as soon as next year.

**African Growth and Opportunities Act**

- The African continent should be a huge magnet for our industry, but many companies are bypassing it because they don't know if Congress will reauthorize AGOA before it expires in September 2025. Washington inaction speaks volumes, and it is currently telling these companies—go elsewhere.

- Sourcing decisions are *already* being made for goods that will be shipped after AGOA's current expiration in September 2025. As we approach the expiration date, trade will drop off further as sourcing is shifted away from African countries to more-predictable trade partners.

- We want to see AGOA renewal for ten years or more, and it needs to be by year-end for investments to flourish as sourcing decision-makers make their decisions in the hours and days ahead.

AAFA is laser focused on making sure these measures get addressed in an end-of-year trade package in December and is starting to see momentum from this work, especially with White House energy behind AGOA.

Failure by Congress to act quickly will adversely affect more than just the U.S. textile and apparel industry. If Congress lets AGOA renewal be delayed, it sends a powerful message that the U.S. is not willing to prioritize a strong U.S.-Africa relationship. At a time when the U.S. is still working to reinforce partnerships globally—and we need those partnerships now more than ever—we simply cannot afford to overlook an entire continent.

If you want to make a trip to Washington, D.C. (in person, virtually or even just on paper) to push progress on these policies, we can help. ●

*About the author: Beth Hughes is vice president, trade and customs policy, at the American Apparel & Footwear Association, where she oversees AAFA's Trade Policy Committee and AAFA's Customs Group. She is also chief spokesperson for the Coalition for Economic Partnership in the Americas (CEPA) launched in November 2021. Follow on LinkedIn and X@BettRae*

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A close-up photograph of a woman's face and hand. She is wearing a large, ornate, multi-tiered earring with many clear crystals. Her hand is raised near her chin, showing her manicured nails which are painted with a shimmering, metallic purple or blue color. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

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