



Cleverhood Shifts into Gear



A modern, high-performance take on the rain cape, Cleverhood products feature innovative use of 3M Scotchlite reflective material. For more on the brand, watch a short video (vimeo.com/32420731) shot in Providence with music by Rhode Island band Deer Tick, or visit cleverhood.com.



Like other textile-centric design hubs currently emerging across the country, Providence, Rhode Island is a blend of old and new. Here you have energetic start-ups partnering with long-established local factories, working together to create cool new products developed with the expertise of textile companies founded 75 years ago when area manufacturing thrived.

According to a recent cover story in the *Providence Business Journal*, the city is having a fashion moment. Providence now hosts twice-yearly fashion shows, local universities turn out graduates with degrees in apparel design and fashion merchandising, a new apparel building is opening at Rhode Island School of Design, a designer co-op resides downtown, retailers carry Rhode Island made clothing and Providence-based designers are selling their products globally.

The “make local” spirit is not

new in these parts, however. After all, the very first American factory was Slater Mill in Pawtucket, which neighbors Providence. And for a long time, Providence was best known for its flourishing jewelry industry. Textiles, too, were once dominant here especially just across the border in Fall River, Massachusetts.

Susan MocarSKI lives this old versus new business juxtaposition everyday. MocarSKI is the founder of Providence-based Cleverhood, a line of smart-looking, well-crafted rain capes. Her garments are designed and manufactured in the U.S., relying mostly on locally sourced materials; the outerwear even comes with Rhode Island-centric names like T.F. Green (the airport); Mr. Fox Point (a Providence neighborhood); and Ocean State Blue.

Launched in April 2012, Cleverhood is a family-run business with an office in what is now called the “Knowledge

District,” a revived downtown area with an influx of tech firms surrounding Brown University’s new medical school. MocarSKI’s brother, Jon Coulbourn, oversees marketing and communications, her son Sam serves as “Gen Y adviser,” and longtime family friend Albania Delgado handles accounting and finance.

“What we’re doing intersects with so many things going on right now,” says MocarSKI, who mentions the categories of urban, urban bike, performance, lifestyle, made local, and community sourcing. But two markets she says are critical: Made in USA and alternative transportation.

“Living in the city and getting around on my bike or even walking, I was not able to get good quality rainwear that was urban-oriented,” explains MocarSKI. “What I wanted was to make a beautiful, functional contemporary poncho.”

She succeeded with Cleverhood

CLEVERHOOD SUPPLY CHAIN



capas that are both practical and stylish. The thoughtful design offers a generous drape to accommodate a backpack or bags gathered from around-town errands and a fitted hood (sized for a bike helmet) that allows wearers clear vision from all angles. Details like stealth magnet fastenings, water-resistant YKK zippers, and simple yet effective elastic cord thumb loops add to the performance of the piece. Another very important feature is a creative use of reflectivity.

Fabric choices range from Glen plaid to Houndstooth with some models interwoven with reflective thread. Technical features include waterproof-breathable membrane fabric and protective seam sealing construction. 3M Scotchlite reflective material is used as trim and a back tag.

While the Cleverhood collection

Cleverhood is a family affair: Susan MocarSKI, her brother Jon Coulbourn and longtime family friend Albania Delgado.

is expanding – a surf cape is on the drawing board – and the brand is gaining exposure here and abroad, growing the business has been something of an uphill ride. The first place MocarSKI took her idea to, a well-known Rhode Island fabric resource, basically told MocarSKI, “no can do.”

In time, however, MocarSKI connected with a handful of



vendors located in, of all places Cranston, Westerly and Smithfield, Rhode Island, along with factories in Fall River, MA, and thus, the Cleverhood rain cape took shape.

“The biggest problem is the absolute disconnect,” comments MocarSKI. “USA-made has to have community, but there is an old school way of thinking that you keep your sources close and don’t share. We are re-thinking this and I really work hard to connect with new makers. It is a lot about word of mouth. Unless we communicate, we can’t help each other.”

She adds that despite “fervor” for USA-made, local suppliers often can’t provide what is needed. “It’s a feeling of, ‘you can’t get there from here,’” MocarSKI says. For example, almost half of Cleverhood fabric is made offshore in order to meet MocarSKI’s needs. She also explains, “All of our black zippers are U.S. made; we try to use those as much as possible. All other colors are offshore.”

Another example is the need for sewers locally. “Even if I go into a bakery, I’ll ask ‘do you know any sewers?’”

Add to that set of difficulties today’s changing retail environment. “Right now it’s a whole different ball game in terms of retail and in terms of who is buying what. There is now a generation of kids buying USA made product and thinking about consumerism in a new way.” Cleverhood sells direct and sells wholesale. Says MocarSKI, “It is not one size fits all.”

Yet, MocarSKI, and others like her, continue to pioneer this new world of business and making things. “We need to be creative, and we need to be nimble because my customer is changing and evolving, too. You’ve got to be flexible in your approach and have a ‘now’ mentality,” she states.

“I think that as we grow we could develop partnerships and figure out how to make things smarter,” she adds. “We are on the cusp of a new way of doing things. Let’s invest in USA. Let’s get people together.” ●



Connecting the dots along the Cleverhood supply chain reveals how tricky it can be to source from one’s own backyard and manufacture domestically. For example, MocarSKI looks to Fall River factories for some fabric and the elastic cord. She gets some rollgoods from Brookwood and will be working with Darlington on a new surf cape; both are located in RI. Metlon of Cranston, RI supplies the reflective material. YKK zippers come from a Georgia plant, but not all YKK products are manufactured stateside. Some fabric MocarSKI uses is sourced from Taiwan. Cut and sew is done in a California factory.

When *Textile Insight* met with MocarSKI in Providence recently, we did a mini supply chain field trip, visiting three of her vendors in the space of a few hours. Here are a few snapshots of those companies:

ROSS MATTHEWS: Established in 1938 Ross Matthews specializes in elastic cord with a large factory space in Fall River, MA. It is where MocarSKI gets the elastic for Cleverhood thumb loops. CEO Dave Angelo is a career textile exec; prior to Ross Matthews he spent many years selling shoelaces to shoe factories in Brockton, MA. Angelo tells us that Ross Matthews is moving to a smaller facility in Rhode Island that will hopefully help keep the business going.

DURO TEXTILES: Founded in 1947, Duro is one of MocarSKI’s fabric suppliers. In recent years the Fall River, MA firm has focused on big contracts for the military, as well as textiles for foreign military uniforms. However, the company looks to do more commercial work, offering a host of different performance fabrics with features such as FR, water-repel, stain-resist, antimicrobial and insect-repellant.

METLON: This Cranston, RI business started in 1947 and has expertise in “narrow and/or accurate slitting,” cutting so thin as one-third the width of a single strand of hair. This is where MocarSKI finds her reflective materials, and also where she enjoys a good working relationship with company president Wayne Etchells, who has been with Metlon since 1977.

Sales are up over last year, despite reduced production and employment. “Our business is profitable because we picked up work as a distributor rather than a manufacturer,” Etchells explains. Nowadays Metlon focuses on 3M raw materials and acts as a distributor for 3M.

Metlon has a reputation for working with local designers. “One thing I’ve learned is that you never know what small order is going to turn into the next big thing,” says Etchells.