



A Case Study in Cooperative Innovation & Regional Self-Determination

December, 2022

I. Introduction

The Carolina Textile District (CTD) in rural Western North Carolina is one of the most captivating and inspiring examples in the United States today of rural businesses creatively and proactively joining in “coopetition” to improve the economic underpinning of an entire region. CTD is a cooperative effort of local manufacturers across the textile supply chain who have joined together to “be big by being small together.” This network of producers works to create a community for small and mid-sized manufacturers to drive innovation and revitalize the local textile economy. CTD members share a commitment to working together for the good of all, as well as sharing practical things such as workforce training expenses and common contracts, and collaborating at various levels on a range of projects.

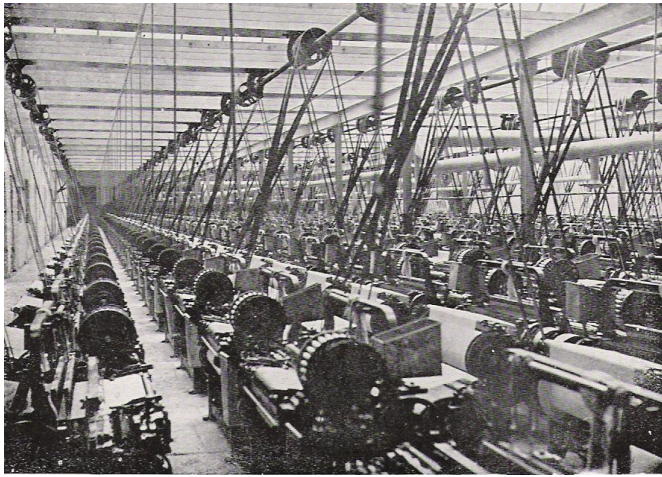


CTD members began their collaboration in 2013. The true value and potential of this collaborative effort became clear however, when their local community—and the world—were thrown into turmoil by the global pandemic. When COVID-19 hit, the CTD provided the core organizing and distribution mechanism needed to quickly and efficiently re-focus local plants shuttered by canceled contracts, and re-tool them to take on the manufacture of protective masks and gowns instead. The results were impressive: 60 mills kept in operation, scores of jobs saved, \$4 million paid in local wages, and over a million masks and gowns produced providing rural hospital workers and patients with vital protective equipment, at a time when it was virtually impossible to purchase these items on the open market. Functioning at a level far beyond a mere network of allied businesses, the CTD acted swiftly and decisively to align regional businesses toward common solutions that kept them in business while delivering vital aid to their surrounding communities. For anyone who wonders how industry knowledge and small business interests can be harnessed for the common good, there are few better contemporary examples than the Carolina Textile District.

II. Beginning at the Beginning

Textiles, along with furniture making, provide the bedrock of the local economy in Western North Carolina and are two of the oldest manufacturing industries in the country. This largely rural region, may not be the first place one would think to look for cutting-edge adaptations of a legacy industry to the internet age, but then again, this is not the first time the textile industry has been at the heart of profound industrial change.

As students of economic history will remember, the Industrial Revolution began with the mechanization of production methods for the spinning of yarn and weaving of cloth, activities that had formerly been done by hand. With the advent of modern machinery, textile production quickly became the dominant industry of the nascent Industrial Revolution in terms of both employment and output, and by the early 19th century, changes first wrought in the cotton mills of Lancashire, England were changing the way the world worked forever.



Mechanized production of yarn and cloth spread quickly to New England. By the early 20th century, England had lost its place as the leader of the sector to the United States. As the new century progressed, the South took a leading role in production, and by 1923, North Carolina had overtaken Massachusetts as the leading textile producing state in the nation.¹ By 1940, 40% of all jobs in North Carolina were in textile and apparel manufacturing.²

This dominance was not to last. Drawn by yet cheaper labor, production shifted once again, this time largely to Asia, draining thousands of jobs from Southern states. About 650 American textile plants closed in the decade

between 1997 and 2009. By 2013, the year the Carolina Textile District was founded, employment in the North Carolina textile industry had fallen from a high of 40% to only 1.1% of the state's jobs.³

The pain was acutely felt in the region around Burke County and the Hickory-Morganton-Lenoir Metropolitan statistical areas (MSA), where CTD began. From 1995–2010, North Carolina lost 450,000 manufacturing jobs, over a quarter (120,000) in the textile industry. The Hickory MSA alone lost 47,000 manufacturing jobs during this 15-year period. Not surprisingly, this loss in manufacturing jobs coincided with a loss in population, particularly young people. In the decade between 2000 and 2010, the Hickory MSA lost more 18–24-year-olds than any other place in the state.⁴

In the 1990s when the local textile industry was still strong, CTD's hometown of Morganton, NC was named to the Readers' Digest list of "best places to raise a family." By 2013, the Gallup Well-Being index would instead list the Hickory MSA on their list of "most miserable cities in America."⁵

III. The Old Economy Meets a New Age

Yet from this bleak landscape sprouted a new kind of textile company. Opportunity Threads, a worker-owned cooperative cut-and-sew shop, opened its doors in Morganton, NC in 2009. With a largely immigrant workforce and a focus on organic and "upcycled" inputs and sustainable production, Opportunity Threads soon found a niche market among customers with an interest in high-quality, small-run production from a business whose democratic business structure and environmental focus put it in sharp contrast to the majority of textile industry operators. Soon the nascent company had more business

¹ Glass, Brent D., Kelly Kress, Gene Purcell, and Douglas A. Wait, "Textiles," *NCpedia.org*, last modified January 2, 2006, <http://ncpedia.org/textiles-part-2-rise-north-carolina>.

² Mercer, Marsha, "Textile industry comes back to life, especially in the South" *USA Today*, February 5, 2014.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ U.S. Bureau of the Census, cited by The Carolina Textile District, PowerPoint presentation, 2016.

⁵ Chester, Sara. "Connecting Heritage Assets to Modern Demand," *The IEDC Economic Development Journal*, Volume 14, No. 4 (Fall 2015), p. 34.



than it could handle, and unique insight into an emerging market for domestic textile production of a decidedly different flavor than the past.

Opportunity Threads founder Molly Hemstreet quickly found a co-enthusiast and partner in Dan St. Louis of the Manufacturing Solutions Center (MSC), a division of local Catawba Valley Community College, charged with bringing new, 21st century ideas to the region's manufacturers. They brainstormed about ways that the excess demand Opportunity Threads was turning away could instead be harnessed to the advantage of other remaining small-scale firms in the region. Together,

they approached Sara Chester of Burke Development, Inc., a traditional economic development organization whose staff had begun to recognize the need to think differently if the region was to prosper in the future.

Leveraging the direct manufacturing expertise of Opportunity Threads (as well as their thought leadership on wealth- and community-building), the extensive technical knowledge and relationships of the MSC, and the traditional business sector credibility of Burke Development, the three partners pulled together players from inside and outside the region to identify where the industry was moving and how the region might capitalize on its historic assets to meet the business demand of the future.

The landscape scan included consideration of the needs, demands and potential contributions of three major groups: consumers, or the end buyers of the finished goods; clients, the entrepreneurs who might use selected services of the collaboration to foster their own designs or wares; and producers, those local manufacturing firms and prospective members of new Carolina Textile District, who would have a long-term interest in working together and promoting the region.

They trio found opportunity on three levels:

- 1) The Etsy generation and the Makers Movement: The internet profoundly changed the relationship between manufacturer and customer. Whereas before, layers of mysterious bureaucracy kept the two at a considerable distance, with the internet small scale manufacturers could efficiently locate customers for their highly customized or niche products. And for the first time, customers could communicate directly with producers. New small businesses in apparel, home goods, fashion and accessories started popping up, looking for ways to manufacture their goods. These young and tech-savvy entrepreneurs were highly attuned to market trends but frequently needed help with technical issues, such as making a prototype or sourcing materials, or with patterns, packaging or production issues. With over 75% of U.S. manufacturing firms having fewer than 20 employees,⁶ the potential market of small-scale manufacturers is significant.
- 2) Mid-sized domestic companies serving a higher end market: As consumers tired of mass-made merchandise, a new market was emerging for higher-quality, limited-run textiles and upholstered goods, as well as more customized products. Consumers in this market appreciated an "American-made" brand with an environmental focus, and companies valued getting to know their production partners and visiting plants.

6

<https://www.score.org/resource/blog-post/how-small-manufacturing-businesses-drive-us-economy#:~:text=355%2C467%20manufaturing%20companies%20have%20no,have%20more%20than%20500%20employees.>

- 3) Large apparel and accessory companies: Large companies were also finding that a “made in the USA” brand resonated with their end users while the vision of foreign sweatshops did not, leading them to also investigate returning production of some goods to the United States.

Although the textile industry of North Carolina had been devastated in the first decade of the new century, it was down but not out. Even after 120,000 people lost textile jobs, 30,000 jobs remained at firms that were able to stay in business and had by necessity adapted themselves to new economic conditions. These companies, in partnership with new firms like Opportunity Threads, provided a nucleus of industry-savvy manufacturers able to meet the needs of emerging markets.

The Carolina Textile District was launched in 2013 to meet all three of the identified areas of new market demand, by capitalizing on the historic assets of the region while at the same time bringing the local textile industry into a new age of flexible manufacturing runs, environmental sustainability, and high-road production methods that valued both people and place. CTD was formed to act as a “value chain network,” strategically linking supply chain actors through a coordinated yet nimble web.

Foundational for the CTD is that the network is not just transactional; companies are linked together not only for the making of products, but are also connected by shared values and a commitment to building their local community as a prosperous and welcoming place for all.

CTD refers to this new way of textile manufacturing as “Crafted Production.” Under the old textile manufacturing system, a single factory might be contracted to produce tens or even hundreds of thousands of units of the same item for a handful of large companies.

When any one of these large customers decided to move their business overseas, the factory (and community) would be devastated. Crafted production, on the other hand, focusses on high quality, quick turnaround, customized “small runs” of 250–2,500 items. Customers work directly with their domestic production partners at CTD, who are in turn responsive to their needs, embracing rather than rejecting “special requests” like working with organic or recycled inputs. This modern domestic manufacturing approach favors quality over quantity and demands flexibility and quick turnaround times so customers can keep tight control of their inventory. The CTD community includes designers and pattern makers as well as spinners, knitters, dye shops and cut-and-sew operations, so the District can take a potential customer from idea to execution of their textile-based product.

The genius of the CTD is to facilitate an efficient system of “mass production customization” by uniting like-minded small- and mid-size firms in a united effort to help each to be more competitive. The approach builds more business, but it also helps to build more successful companies.

Crafted production is a successful economic strategy because it dovetails with several other powerful market trends, including an increased interest on the part of customers in the provenance of their purchased goods and conditions under which they were made, and an enhanced attentiveness to individual customization and personalization of items, particularly among young people. The trend is made financially feasible by the ability the internet has fostered for end consumers to communicate directly with



manufacturers, without the expense of a storefront retail intermediary. The margin that is saved by not selling through retail outlets exclusively can be used to offset the higher production costs of a domestically produced, crafted product, leveling the playing field for small companies who are committed to high labor and environmental standards. A survey of CTD clients found 90% planned to sell online.

IV. “Being Big by Being Small Together” - CTD Grows and Expands

The first project the CTD took on when it launched was to institute a new Client Intake System to sort and streamline new demand coming to the region’s remaining manufacturers. A frustratingly slow and inefficient system used previously based on dozens of individual phone calls was replaced by a centralized intake system with which CTD staff could match potential customers with the firms in the region that had the capacity and expertise to help with their particular project, while informing customers about parameters such as pricing, minimum orders, capabilities and access to various machine types. The new system saved everyone time and encouraged collaboration between CTD members who could each fill a portion of a particular customer’s needs. Area firms that had known about each other for years finally had the platform and opportunity to really know each other and work together. “The companies involved with CTD are not in competition with each other,” notes area business owners and member Lori Trotter. “Instead, they work together to promote and support each other.” CTD member companies flourished, adding new employees to keep up with the new business.

“The companies involved with CTD are not in competition with each other. Instead, they work together to promote and support each other.”

Lori Trotter, Trotter’s Sewing Company, CTD Member Business

The second big initiative of the District was to organize the significant interest of engaged, yet sometimes naïve sector of small-scale makers into a series of classes and workshops offered by CTD staff and members for a fee. A “Sewn Goods 101” workshop, offered in-person and online, teaches entrepreneurs about the process of production for domestic sewn goods, including sourcing materials, before linking them with a CTD member for production. For entrepreneurs who are interested in opening their own cut and sew factory, CTD offers a “Crafted Production” workshop. Assistance on other technical matters is offered through online modules or tailored consulting engagements. These courses, on a fee-for-service basis, were the beginning of CTD’s earned income revenue stream.



In its first three years of operation the Carolina Textile District had a significant positive impact on member firms. By 2016 on average, each partner firm in the CTD saw 14.8% of overall income from CTD clients. Nearly 90% added employees and 87% reported having made shifts in their business model to accommodate modern demand. Seven of eight reported currently exporting products internationally in addition to their domestic orders, and 73% said they had worked collaboratively with another CTD member in the past three years. On average, each CTD partner reported forming at least three new relationships with another local manufacturer or supplier through their participation in the CTD. And the impact does not

stop there. CTD staff calculate that over 400 companies have been involved in some way in CTD activities through such things as shared contracts, training, and supply relationships.

In the past five years the District focused on refining its vital core capacities and achieving self-sufficiency. Other benefits were added for CTD member companies, including free legal assistance through a partnership with Wake Forest Law Clinic and small business loans and access to financial literacy training for employees. In 2019 the group launched a significant new member benefit: shared job training. At the

time, all of the CTD production members were stymied by a lack of trained workers. Losing the generation of young people who had moved away 15–20 years earlier during the retraction of the textile industry meant the skilled workforce of the area was older, with many approaching retirement. Job training was identified as a key factor for keeping young workers engaged, yet no relevant training was being offered at the time by the region's educational institutions. CTD stepped into the void, and purchased an industry leading curriculum to train the area's young workers, preparing them for roles as skilled sewers and machine operators for CTD member firms. Since that time the CTD Industrial Sewing Program has expanded to serve two regions via relationships and partnerships with three community colleges. Despite classes being put on hold during the pandemic, CTD has trained nearly 60 individuals in sewing, connecting many to full time, quality jobs. The District also works with public schools and community colleges to provide exposure for young people about the opportunities that exist in the local manufacturing sector.

At around that same time, CTD members chatting at one of their gatherings noted that every one of them was sewing for someone else and wondered, "What if we could sew for ourselves?" In 2019, COLLECTION, the brand of the Carolina Textile District partners, was launched. While productive capacity was detoured to mask making in 2020–2021 (see below), in 2022, COLLECTION turned its focus to university bookstores and, through partnerships with book store management companies, began distributing products to college students across the country. An initial offering of wares at a national food co-op conference was also very successful. Plans call for COLLECTION to act as a showcase of the craftsmanship of CTD partners and the circular and regenerative economy of the Western North Carolina region – particularly by making products without "making anything new" by leveraging its relationship with its sister enterprise Material Return to make products from textile waste via circular production methods.

Carolina Textile District Key Events

2012

CTD is formed by Molly Hemstreet (Opportunity Threads), Dan St. Louis (Manufacturing Solutions Center) and Sara Chester (Burke Development, Inc.)

2013

Hires first full-time staff person; client intake system is launched; first members join

2014

Sewn Goods 101 Workshops (to educate entrepreneurs about domestic manufacturing) are launched

2017

Members identify skilled training and textile waste as collective issues to solve at annual member gathering

2018

Crafted Production Workshop (which teaches how to run a cut and sew factory) is launched

2019

CTD launches COLLECTION and initiates new skilled training (Industrial Sewing Program)

2020

COVID-19 Pandemic; CTD coordinates 60 mills for production of over 500,000 masks & gowns (putting \$4M into the economy when others were closing their doors)

2021

CTD Members number 28 and vote to enact "standards" around wages and benefits, environmental stewardship, worker voice & agency and diversity, equity and inclusion

2022

Industrial Sewing Program expands to 3 WNC locations; CTD adds Upholstery Training Program; members launch first "collab" to highlight local partnerships.

V. Operations and Governance

The rapid success of the CTD would not have been possible without the help of two foundational development grants, one from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) and another from the Economic Development Administration (EDA). These two grants paid for staff time while CTD established its value proposition, recruited paying members and developed its suite of fee-for-service offerings, achieving self-sufficiency by the end of its fifth year of operations.

Throughout its history, the CTD has benefited from a stance that is strict on values, but broadly inclusive of organizational type and history. While the leadership of Opportunity Threads brought the entrepreneurial energy and practical industry know-how of a real company to the table; and the Manufacturing Solutions Center brought the broad industry knowledge and relationships to know what is possible; it was Burke Development, the conventional economic development entity, that leveraged its credibility with government funders to secure the critical initial funding to make CTD possible. The differing strengths yet mutually respectful and collaborative stance of these three founding organizations set the tone for CTD going forward, and provided a foundational grounding for its subsequent success.

The Carolina Textile District is now legally structured as a wholly-owned subsidiary of the nonprofit The Industrial Commons (TIC), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that works broadly to foster an industry- and equity-focused approach to support local companies in a way that also improves the lives of residents and roots wealth in communities. TIC supports a wide range of interconnected programs which, like the Carolina Textile District, build on the assets of the western North Carolina region and bring workers, manufacturers, and community members together to find solutions to persistent problems like poverty, out-migration, and disinvestment—solutions that not only make sense economically, but that will steward the natural beauty of the region and benefit its people.

Other Industrial Commons initiatives include workforce and business development services, an ethically-produced clothing line, a business making socks and other useful items from the scrap of local textile companies, a new affordable housing development, and various arts, education, and cultural projects. These diverse efforts are all united under TIC's "ecosystem" approach, a tangible, deliberate, thoughtful and integrated system of policies, practices and institutions that convene for the support and development of enterprises that are owned, controlled and accountable to members of the community in which they exist. It is a development philosophy that, in the words of its local leaders, "uses cooperative principles to harness the participatory power of communities to solve their own problems and to build an economy and equitable social fabric that breaks the cycle of generational poverty and marginalization."

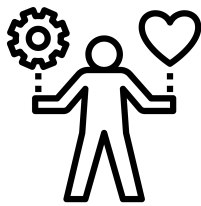
While the Carolina Textile District is technically owned by TIC which also provides key staffing and support, the governance of the network is by member companies. Membership in the Carolina Textile District is a two-tiered affair. Any local company working in the textile industry in some capacity that wants to work with others in the region can apply to be a CTD "collaborator." Once established as an effective collaborator, a member can apply to be a "partner" in CTD. Only partners can vote on matters pertaining to the organization (on a one partner, one vote basis), and partnership is closely guarded. For many of the nine partner organizations, vetting new partners is the most important role they play. A dedication to quality is essential, as is a broader commitment to the values of collaboration on a foundational and not only transactional level. CTD partners have to believe that "we are stronger together" and put that belief into action.

It is no small matter for a manufacturer to invite another manufacturer into their factory, either literally or figuratively; CTD partners must have that level of trust. Both companies and individual representatives are vetting for proper fit, so if a key management position changes for a CTD partner, the company must be

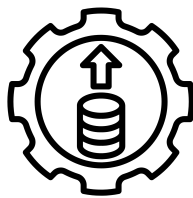
re-evaluated for partnership status. The thoroughness of the review process means that a customer can go to any CTD member and be assured of a level of consistency and quality that is hard to find overseas.

For CTD members themselves as well, the formal Partnership Standards provide a common framework and language for companies to engage with one another and further articulate their shared values, in both words and actions. The CTD Partnership standards have four pillars: Wages & Benefits; Diversity, Equity & Inclusion; Voice & Agency; and Environmental Stewardship. CTD partner companies worked together to come up with specific standards in each area and agree on the minimum number a company must meet to be eligible for partnership status.

But the emphasis on measurable standards of practice and well-defined outcomes belies the fundamentally collaborative nature of the CTD: “The most valuable thing about the CTD . . . is the close relationships I have made with other members that act as advisors and comrades in the industry . . . We feel motivated and expected to uphold a high level of “standards” and we appreciate that level of accountability” explains CTD member Libby O-Bryan. Camaraderie and common purpose are what brings CTD businesses together, and what keeps them coming back. The twice annual in-person gatherings are well-attended and provide a forum for partners to exchange ideas, support each other, share best practices, and consult with one another on their next big project.



Worker Voice + Agency



Wages + Benefits



Environmental Sustainability



Diversity, Equity + Inclusion

VI. Coming Together in a Time of Crisis: Cooperation Makes a Community Safer and Stronger

At the dawn of the global pandemic in March of 2020, the CTD members had comfortably worked together for years, passing leads back and forth, and coming together in supply chains for various customers and projects. But they had never before taken the step to actually bid on large contracts together, merging their productive capacity into a single, seamless, collaborative stream of output. The pandemic forced many people and institutions into unfamiliar roles, driving them to achieve heights that only a few years before they would have found implausible, if not impossible. The pandemic changed everything, and CTD was no different.

When Covid-19 first hit in the spring of 2020, western North Carolina quickly became a hotbed of the virus; the small, rural hospitals, nursing homes and medical facilities serving the region rapidly ran short of supplies. With no product available anywhere, lack of appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for frontline workers swiftly hit a crisis level, endangering workers, families and patients. Fortunately for the community, CTD was able to step in to fill the void. Staff moved from documenting the need to procuring raw materials to organizing production all within a few short weeks—ultimately coordinating over 60 regional manufacturing plants of all sizes to shift production from whatever textile or upholstered product they had been making, to making over 700,000 face masks and medical gowns.

Members would receive fabric and supplies, kits, and technical requirements from the CTD to fill the mask and gown contracts. Then they would return the finished product to the CTD for shipping. But assembling

the network was only one step. The CTD also consulted doctors to quickly develop mask and gown prototypes. Working with the Manufacturing Solutions Center and other allies, CTD tested and sourced specialized fabric, standardized patterns, and created technical specifications for the masks and gowns. Production began in April 2020 and continued intensely for 24 weeks until global supply chain problems had eased, and customers were able to source PPE from more conventional suppliers.

Membership in the CTD doubled from about 15 to 30 during this period, as more local companies sought to join in the PPE effort. For most of these plants, participating in the PPE emergency response project allowed them to safely keep their doors open and for their employees to continue working. CTD staff leveraged relationships with traditional economic development entities and community organizations to secure contracts from local schools, the state of North Carolina, area hospitals and medical facilities and others.

For at least five of the local employers, the PPE contracts organized by the District were the only thing that kept them from shutting their doors completely. At least two new companies were launched as a result of the mask and gown contracts. Close to 100 local jobs were saved, and several businesses even expanded employment during the pandemic rather than laying workers off. At a time of extreme economic insecurity, the gown and mask contracts organized by the Carolina Textile District drove more than \$4 million into the local economy. In addition to selling gowns and masks through institutional contracts, the CTD also donated over 80,000 cloth masks in the local community to help individuals and organizations that could not afford to purchase them.

The catalytic role played by CTD in helping a small rural community respond decisively, proactively and creatively to a crisis of international proportions is a vivid illustration of the power of cooperative action in meeting unanticipated situations and dealing with daunting economic challenges. Without the trust, knowledge and confidence that CTD members had built with each other to begin with, the coordinated production of protective equipment would not have been possible. As it was, an effort by a dozen local companies to forge their own economic path and create their own future based on the values of working together and caring for each other, ultimately helped protect the health and safety of an entire local community. When global and national supply chains left rural hospitals, patients and direct care workers on the sidelines, it was their own neighbors, in the form of the CTD, who were able to deliver the equipment they so desperately needed.

VII. Looking to the Future

The Carolina Textile District is an exemplary illustration of a new and different way of looking at American manufacturing and their workers. While the CTD is

“The most valuable thing about the CTD for our business is the close relationships I have made with other members of the CTD that act as advisors and comrades in the industry . . . We feel motivated and expected to uphold a high level of “standards” and we appreciate that level of accountability. We have been introduced to new models and solutions for both financial and social impact.”

Libby O'Bryan, Sew Co, CTD Partner



purposefully respectful of the past, their way is not to be dragged down by nostalgia. Rather, District leaders harness the tools of the past to build a new, more equitable future. Throughout their strategy and their actions, it is clear to see the dynamic conversation happening at every juncture, between the past and the future, the legacy industries and the cutting edge, Old School and Etsy.

It is the perennial question of history, of economic development, of every wayfaring child who ever left home: “Can we move forward without leaving the past completely behind?” The answer of CTD is not only yes, but that the past is actually our road to the future.

The dash of impatience inherent in the customized, short-run, “just in time” inventory management facilitated by CTD’s Crafted Production strategy masks a deeply patient approach to transformational change, built upon authentic and egalitarian human relationships. Everyone gets a seat at the table in CTD’s new world, from new immigrants to legacy mill owners from septuagenarian sewers to up-and-coming designers.

A special seat at the table is reserved for young people. A recent national survey of millennials⁷ asking them to rank various fields for their careers put manufacturing at the very bottom, citing the work as unstable, boring and disagreeable. For a region like western North Carolina that is built on manufacturing, this is not good news. But the CTD’s emphasis on collaboration, craft production, high quality goods, environmental stewardship and widespread opportunities for quality jobs can be just the thing to engage a new generation of workers in the oldest mechanized manufacturing sector in the world.

In many ways the CTD’s work is just beginning. One of the things proved during the pandemic was that an inclusive and comprehensive economic development strategy like the CTD’s can have a major positive impact in its community in a broad number of ways. When three key players joined together in 2013 to try out a new industry-focused experiment in textile production, who would have thought that major beneficiaries of their work just seven years later would be elders in local a nursing home or front-line workers in a rural hospital, none of whom necessarily had any direct relationship to the textile industry?

“I like to say not one person has the answer, the answer lies within your community. This is my community.”

Eric Henry, TS Designs, CTD Partner

In another way, however, this result is not surprising. From the beginning, CTD has centered on building relationships—within, across and between different groups in the local community, some of whom may never have seen their common cause before. While many business strategies promote a focus on cut-throat competition, short-term gain and aggressive pursuit of investor benefit alone, the CTD is an example of an extremely successful business strategy that does just the opposite. While deification of the CEO is the norm in conventional business circles, the CTD perspective is that everyone has something to contribute, given the right circumstances. “I like to say that not one person has the answer; the answer lies within the community,” says Eric Henry, owner of TS Designs and a member of the CTD circle. “And this,” he says, “is my community.”

⁷ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-manufacturers-are-recruiting-millennials-1465351261>

Sources:

Chester, Sara. "Connecting Heritage Assets to Modern Demand", *The IEDC Economic Development Journal*, Volume 14, No 4 (Fall 2015).

Chester, Sara and Molly Hemstreet. "Rooting Economic Change: A summary", the Democracy At Work Institute, 2017.

Chester, Sara and Molly Hemstreet. "The Carolina Textile District and the Industrial Commons", the Democracy At Work Institute, nd.

The Carolina Textile District, 2016 Strategic Plan.

Glass, Brent D., Kelly Kress, Gene Purcell, and Douglas A. Wait, "Textiles," *NCpedia.org*, last modified January 2, 2006, <http://ncpedia.org/textiles-part-2-rise-north-carolina>.

McConnan, Aili. "How manufacturers are Recruiting Millennials", *Wall Street Journal*, June 7, 2016, accessed at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-manufacturers-are-recruiting-millennials-1465351261>

Mercer, Marsha, "Textile industry comes back to life, especially in the South" *USA Today*, February 5, 2014.

US Bureau of the Census, cited by The Carolina Textile District, PowerPoint presentation, 2016.

"Cotton Mill". Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cotton_mill, accessed October 25, 2022.

"Industrial Revolution". Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_Revolution, accessed October 25, 2022.

"Rethreading a textile heritage: one stitch at a time." *Wealthworks*, October 2013, volume 1.

Photo credits: Franzi Charen, TIC Staff

*This case study was written by **Margaret Lund** for the [Democracy At Work Institute](#) with generous funding from the [United States Department of Agriculture](#). © 2022*

