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**ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:** 

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# HOMEWORLI



# Top Merchants Helped Guide Housewares Through Crisis

NEW YORK— Welcome to the 21st annual HOMEWORLD BUSINESS® Impact Merchants special report.

Housewares suppliers, representing the categories that HomeWorld covers, once again were asked to nominate buyers and merchandisers believed to have made a significant impact during the past year and the COVID crisis.

Voters were asked to assess each buyer's merchandising creativity, trend and marketing knowledge, relationship building and other factors.

The selection of the Impact Merchant winners is not intended as a definitive list of the best merchants in housewares retailing. Votes went to several more merchandisers than those featured. This year's honorees represent buyers in given categories that received the majority of votes by vendors polled.

**PROFILES START ON PAGE 20** 

MADE IN USA

# Supply Chain Disruptions Strengthen Made In USA

By MIKE DUFF Executive Editor

NEW YORK- Made in the USA has become an increasingly vital concept both in terms of its importance and its multifaceted development in a more complex marketplace that has itself become more dynamic in the COVID-19 pandemic.

The advent of the coronavirus outbreak in the U.S. certainly has an impact on how consumers think about products made in offshore manufacturing's main region, China. A number of home furnishings and housewares manufacturers have seen commitment to producing products in the U.S. have more beneficial effects, in part because omnichannel retail has made faster replenishment and shorter supply lines more attractive and in part because of consumer wariness about purchasing products made in China.

Indeed, from tabletop to kitchen appliances to ready-to-assemble furniture, consumers are thinking more carefully about products made in China as they become

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#### **Kitchen Electrics**

SodaStream positions brand for changing retail landscape.  $\pmb{Page~10}$ 

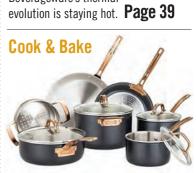
"We are data driven. That's how we stav ahead of the curve and create the right products."

> -Joana McKenna, Walker Edison

> > Page 10



Beverageware's thermal



Clipper taps design trends for latest Viking cookware set. Page 34





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HomeWorld's 21st annual Impact Merchants special report profiles leading buyers and merchandisers, who have been nominated by vendors for their diverse retailing expertise, top housewares partnerships and success in an evolving retail market.

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Slightly more than 18 months after being acquired by global beverage giant PepsiCo, SodaStream is enjoying expansion. SodaStream USA's general manager Bryan Welsh dishes on the brand's recent initiatives and how it is positioning itself for a changing retail landscape.

# **NEW AGE**



"Like a ballerina, the elegance and grace of porcelain is achieved through a long and challenging process that requires dedication to the craft" Mr. İmge Pamukçu, Member of Board.

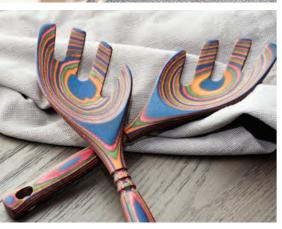
Porland, a family owned business founded in Turkey over 40 years ago specializes in manufacturing hand crafted porcelain products. Digital printing using environmentally friendly production techniques is one example of Porland's commitment to being the market leader in porcelain.



# Island Bamboo







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# Welsh Positions SodaStream For Changing Retail Landscape

By Donna Boyle Schwartz Contributing Editor

MT. LAUREL, NJ— Slightly more than 18 months after being acquired by global beverage giant PepsiCo in a deal valued at \$3.2 billion, SodaStream is enjoying expansion in sales of its consumer home carbonation products, including carbonation machines, CO2 cartridges, syrups, concentrates and other water flavorings.

Indeed, in a recent earnings report, PepsiCo stated that SodaStream delivered more than 20% global net revenue growth in the first quarter of 2020.

SodaStream's progress is being directed by Bryan Welsh, a 28-year PepsiCo veteran who was named general manager of SodaStream USA in January 2019, shortly after the acquisition was completed. Welsh previously held management positions within PepsiCo sales, marketing and operations, working on leading brands including Pepsi, Starbucks, Mountain Dew, Tropicana, Gatorade, Aquafina and Quaker Oats.

Welsh said his first focus was on SodaStream's people. "One of my goals over the past year and a half has been to build the best team in the business," he said. "We have invested in the people to take us to the next level, from top management and sales, to e-commerce and customer service."

Some of the newest management additions include the appointment of Richard Hinsliff as vp/sales, and the appointment of Matt Kahn as the company's first chief marketing officer.

Another major initial focus for Welsh has been positioning SodaStream for "the future of retail. We see the future as e-commerce," he said, noting that the company has been working closely with its retail customers on e-commerce platforms, as well as developing a more robust direct-to-consumer online shopping and home delivery program.

Many of SodaStream's largest retail customers have been aggressively pursuing an integrated store and online strategy, and therefore SodaStream has been working closely with its customers on home delivery services.

"Many of our retail customers— including Walmart, Bed Bath & Beyond and Target— have been making a big push with e-commerce, so this has been a big push for us," Welsh said. "Then, when the COVID-19 situation hit, we were prepared and ready to meet that demand for home delivery."



"Sparkling water has just exploded, as part of the overall trend towards health and wellness."

> —Bryan Welsh, SodaStream USA

The COVID-19 cloud has had a silver lining for SodaStream, as the company has experienced spikes in demand, both from its retail customers as well as direct consumer sales.

"We have invested in supply chain and delivery and now offer CO2 exchange services right to your door, replacing empty canisters with full ones. The consumer never has to leave home," he pointed out. "As a result, our business has skyrocketed. We are

continued on page 48

# Walker Edison Sets Stage For Growth Plans

By Mike Duff
Executive Editor

SALT LAKE CITY, UT— Walker Edison has big plans, among them expanding its core operation, building a rapidly growing European business, developing private label programs with retailer partners and establishing a direct to consumer element, and it has hired former Walmart executive Joana McKenna to help make that happen.

McKenna will take the president's position at Walker Edison, with co-founder Brad Bonham remaining CEO and co-founder Matt Davis remaining COO.

Bonham told HomeWorld Business

that McKenna's appointment followed a long search for a senior executive with the experience and leadership skills to help accelerate gains at already rapidly growing Walker Edison to a whole new level.

"Joana brings the experience that will usher in a new era of growth and innovation at Walker Edison," he said. "Her skillset will allow us to pursue concepts we have always envisioned but haven't had the bandwidth to test."

Bonham added that Walker Edison is pursuing additional executive talent as it sets plans for the future.

By bolstering management with new additions, Walker Edison is bringing in expertise that will not only help it expand its markets but also enhance its supply chains. The company plans to diversify its supply chain and maximize the effectiveness of a function that has become more complex in a ready-to-assemble furniture business

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"We are data driven. That's how we stay ahead of the curve."

—Joana McKenna, Walker Edison

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# The Toughest Test For 2020 Impact Merchants

As it became clearer in March that retailing, an already fickle business in the e-commerce age, was in for a new disruption of immeasurable enormity and consequence, it also became clearer vendor-buyer relations, already confrontational at times, were about to be tested like never before.

It was stunningly surreal as store lockdowns mounted nationwide. Virtually overnight, many retailers and their suppliers were swirling in the same vortex of revenue, income and cash flow uncertainty.

#### **Tipping The Scales**

It didn't take long for suppliers to ring in with tales of customers, some of them quite healthy before the pandemic, daring to seek prolonged payment terms on orders already negotiated, many of them shipped.

To some vendors, it felt like the latest abuse by customers in a string of abuses that had begun a generation ago as retail consolidation tipped the scales to fast-expanding operators and what often seemed like spreadsheet-controlled approaches to merchandising.

The darkest, earliest stages of a widescale business crisis can exacerbate the natural imbalance of power in



manding terminus of a supply chain to its more vulnerable origin. And, yes, vendors are often caught in the middle.

most seller-buyer dy-

namics, often releas-

ing rash, protective

instincts and decisions

that can trickle down

from the more com-

#### **Shared Crisis**

It can be revealing, if not at all relieving, to step back whenever possible from the raging flames of a shared crisis to try to see how everyone along the chain is feeling the burn and coping with it. Such appreciation can be the catalyst to restoring genuineness to the concept of partnership, a word that has been tossed around so gratuitously in recent years that, to many, it has the hollowest of rings.

This makes this year's edition of the HomeWorld Business Impact Merchants, beginning on page 20, particularly intriguing. As with many facets of business and life, what often seems like instant change actually is the accelerated intensification of wants, needs, plans and actions already in motion.

HomeWorld's Impact Merchants report was started several years ago to recognize buyers and merchandising executives across the home and housewares business who transcend the volume of sales for which they are responsible. It always has been a forum for vendors to nominate architects of retail programs, regardless of dollar size and scope, based on a blend of creativity, communication, cooperation and collaboration.

#### Extra Consideration

Such hallmarks of successful, enterprising merchandising, blurred perhaps at times by corporate restraint and risk aversion, should prove even more mutually beneficial to vendors and their customers in this recovering marketplace if given the chance to flourish.

Extra consideration in the selection of this year's Impact Merchants was given to the leadership they demonstrated and the trust they cultivated in helping guide vendors through the pandemic.

They've passed the first part of what could be the toughest test they'll ever face.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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# Capresso Capturing Coffee Shop Experience At Home

By Donna Boyle Schwartz
Contributing Editor

MONTVALE, NJ— Capresso, one of the first companies to tap into the burgeoning craft coffee movement, is marking its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year with an expanded assortment of differentiated products and continuing commitment to helping consumers capture the coffee shop experience at home.

"Capresso's tagline is 'Best in Brewing,' which encompasses everything we have to offer," said David Shull, evp/marketing and communications for Jura Inc., Capresso's parent company since 2008. "Our products can be bundled for a strong merchandising story, whether it's a coffeemaker, grinder and milk frother for a coffee shop experience at home, or an espresso machine and top notch grinder for the first-time barista."

"We offer a variety of models that can easily complement any home coffee or tea bar," Shull added. "We extensively test every new machine in multiple settings before the product is launched to ensure top quality. Our office features a large test kitchen where the products are used daily to replicate home wear and tear."

Capresso, with a brand name based on the combination of words "cappuccino" and "espresso," was founded in 1995, debuting the Capresso CoffeeTeam, the first coffeemaker/burr grinder combination. Other industry firsts followed, including the first pump espresso machines with stainless steel lined ThermoBlock, the first stand-alone automatic milk frother for home use, the first automatic coffeemaker with a stainless steel thermal carafe and stainless steel lined heating system, and the first burr grinder with an exclusive electronic sensor.

"For 25 years, Capresso has been on the cutting edge of quality in brewing coffee at home," Shull said. "We started with only four coffee and tea products and have expanded our current line to over 40 products in multiple categories. The significant changes have been adding new categories like automatic milk frothers, iced tea makers and care products, as well as differentiating the products into a good, better, best strategy."

"Brewing coffee at home is a growing trend in 2020, and we see conical burr grinders, like our Infinity series, are



trending up," Shull added. "Customers want to replicate their favorite café style beverages at home, and freshly grinding your coffee right before brewing is the easiest way to improve your home brewing experience. We have also seen an uptick in espresso machine sales during the first half of the year."

The brand's current product line encompasses coffeemakers, espresso machines, coffee grinders, milk frothers, water kettles, iced tea makers, coffee beans and care products. Recent new product introductions include a series of upgraded models including the EC Select Pump Espresso & Cappuccino Machine, the Grind Select Coffee Burr Grinder, the programmable H2O Select Water Kettle and the Froth Select automatic milk frother.

"Capresso offers a good/better/best assortment within each of our segments, and our product development combines continuity with innovation," Shull noted. "For example, the Coffee-Team concept of a coffeemaker with built-in grinder has been with us from the conception of the brand. It's grown through various generations, and we have four updated models in the line today."

Although Capresso always has been focused on creating an upscale beverage in the home, the brand has gotten a boost during the global pandemic and the stay-at-home orders.

"With more people wanting and needing coffee brewed at home, we've continued on page 46

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# U.S.-Made Storage Vendors Maintain Production

By MIKE DUFF
Executive Editor

LEOMINSTER, MA— The plastic storage category includes stalwart Made in the USA players who have experienced COVID-19 related challenges this year but continue to thrive.

As with other American manufacturers, they have been subject to health-related difficulties that have slowed down and even halted production, but they've managed to roll with the punches and continue to maintain production as the



"By being close to our customers it allowed us to react, gain additional sales and execute on time."

—David Reilly, United Solutions coronavirus crisis has proceeded. Even in doing so, they continue working to identify and adapt to consumer lifestyle changes, which have made storage a more important consideration for households where a greater range of activities is happening in the home. With movement restrictions, the focus of activity in the home has created a particular situation where consumers are conducting more professional and leisure activities in the limited space. So, storage has been important to keeping the extra activity orderly.

Headquartered and manufacturing in Townsend, MA, Sterilite operates additional plants as far west as Arizona, with warehouse space included, which helped the company keep product flowing through the year.

United Solutions, headquartered and manufacturing in Leominster, MA, has been a manufacturing mainstay in the state for just over 100 years, with an additional plant in Sardis, MS, and recently has been adding additional resources and developing a focused strategy that it is following to pace the changing marketplace.

David Reilly, who recently came on as United Solutions president, noted that, during the height of the coronavirus crisis production suffered from a degree of absenteeism, causing capacity constraints and impacting productivity. Some employees were genuinely concerned about contracting COVID-19 and some took advantage of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act to care for relatives but some also resigned in hopes of receiving unemployment and the additional \$600 a week federal government boost.



To look after employees, United has established company-wide safety protocols that included social distancing with six-foot space when appropriate. The company also has required that employees get the temperatures taken at least once a day, use hand sanitizer throughout the day, pass different doors for entry and exit, wear masks along with usual PPE for safety and maintain communications in a manner designed to ensure they felt the company has been doing whatever necessary to keep them safe and healthy.

"We also shuttered operations for several shifts to address COVID concerns," Reilly added. "We continue to follow the procedures set to ensure a safe working environment and don't see these protocols changing in the near future."

Because its products were essential in nature, as designated by authorities, United was able to move product and keep up with customers, maintaining a strong on time in full flow, Reilly noted.

"Demand continues to be strong," he added. "We established a 24/7 program for both factories. We also increased our base labor rate to attract new hires, as well as partnering with employment agencies to augment our staff."

United's ability to manufacture in

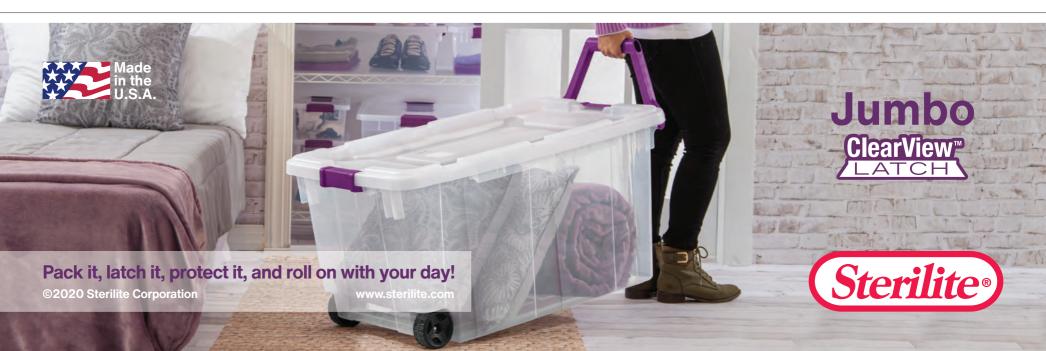


United Solutions addressed the COVID crisis with new procedures to ensure product flow.

the U.S. with a customer-centric staff ready to address the task of dealing with everyday and disruptive circumstances has helped the company work through its recent challenges.

Reilly said, "All of United's products are manufactured in the U.S.

The fluctuations in point-of-sale data, shifting to different products, continually changing our inventory levels and reprioritizing manufacturing all required enhanced agility and reaction time. By being close to our customers, it allowed us to react, gain additional sales and execute on time."





# Surging Support For USA-Made Housewares

continued from page 5 more concerned about where the products they buy are made and the impact the supply chain has on issues they care about.

In the report, "The End of Made in China? A Potential Wave of Moving Sourcing out of China Amid Rising Tensions," Coresight Research pointed out that 22.8% of consumers strongly agreed with the statement U.S. retailers should source fewer products from China, and 25% agreed. Only 6.3% strongly disagreed, 13.6% disagreed and 29.1% neither agreed nor dis-

agreed, while 3.2% didn't know.

When asked about their willingness to buy products made in China after experiencing the effects of the coronavirus, 45.9% said that it had no change in their willingness to buy while 39.7% said it made them less willing, 5% said it made them more willing and 9.5% said they didn't know.

It's worth noting that, in comparing an eight-percentage-point gap between the two viewpoints captured in questioning— if U.S. retailers should reduce their sourcing in China and if the pandemic had dampened

consumers' willingness to buy products made in China— Coresight pointed out that it is possible a segment of American consumers held negative views about sourcing in China prior to the coronavirus crisis. Coresight concluded that political tension and negative consumer sentiment have influenced at least some international companies, including big players such as Apple, to move sourcing out of China. The market research firm asserted it is significant that a second wave of movement out of China is now emerging after a general trend toward

sourcing in other countries began only a few years ago in the face of rising labor costs in the country and the 2018 to 2019 U.S-China tariff conflict.

As they weighed their sourcing prospects, many companies that had been more comfortable with China have not only begun addressing the challenges involved in manufacturing elsewhere but embraced them particularly where they could, with a degree of confidence, tap national expertise in production even while getting away from tariffs. Some RTA furniture suppliers looked

continued on page 16





Over 300 American-Made items across 5 different categories. 74 years in business with millions of customers who know and trust the Nordic Ware Brand.

# Made In USA

continued from page 14

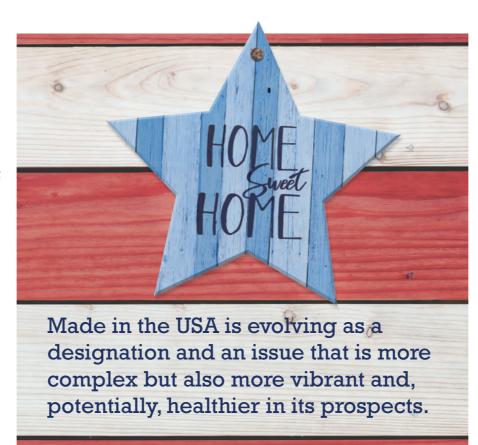
to Indonesia for its ability to produce goods from natural fibers such as rattan and seagrass, which have become more popular with consumers who favor sustainable materials. That being said, international considerations and changes at retail made the U.S. a major consideration in sourcing rethinks.

A significant proportion of consumers continue responding to Made in USA signals even if they will do so within a narrow price elasticity tolerance. However, how consumers are thinking about Made in the USA is changing.

Marsha Everton of The AIM sights Group said the way consumers evaluate Made in the USA in making purchase decisions has a general context. After multiple research projects, the market research has continued to find that Made in the USA is a "nice to have" not "must have" factor, she said. For consumers in general, price is the most important element in making a purchase decision-making followed by convenience and quality. They are a trifecta that notably influences Millennials, who are generally financially conservative and very price conscious, Everton said.

Health and wellness have arisen as an additional consideration that contributes to the value of a product in the consumer's eye. However, wellness in general has become an expansive consideration. Everton pointed out that the wellness of the earth, environment and society can factor into purchase considerations. So, a product that is sustainably produced, marketed and scrapped wins favor as contributing to the social good. Millennials strongly believe, Everton said, that they will individually have to be the change agents that deliver a greater good, as government isn't going to provide leadership. Millennial beliefs have an influence on Baby Boomers, establishing multi-generational interest.

However, certain shifts in consumer concerns have weighed on consumer evaluation of Made in the USA, with one arising from the wellness trend. Now Made in America may mean that you can trust the quality and safety of the product, with safety being the



most important factor, Everton noted. Whether it's concerns about pet food safety, which has discouraged a lot of consumers from purchasing China-made chow, or ethical manufacturing, more consumers, and more young consumers, want greater confidence in who made a product, with what materials, employing which labor practices, with how much of an environmental impact and with what contribution to the greater good.

In that discriminating environment, the Made in the USA designation itself no longer reflects a simple, single issue with consumers. As a consequence, to-day, a certain proportion of consumers is focused not on the national perspective but on the local scene.

Consumers have been embracing local makers, manufacturing heritage and community traditions, and that is having an impact on suppliers and retailers as well. Walmart recently launched and eBay recently expanded programs developed to help smaller, frequently local business succeed online, for example.

Everton said not every company is positioned to leverage interest in local products and small business. Rather than simply getting involved with those operations as an add on, it's important for companies to ensure they line up with brand positioning. That being said, if businesses can incorpo-

rate smaller, closer to home operations in a way consistent with their market positions, they may be able tap into consumer sensibilities in line with those stirred by the designation Made in the USA.

In its "Seven Trends Impacting the Retail and Consumer Products Industries Amid a Global Pandemic and Beyond" report, Deloitte noted that, even if consumers are reconsidering where and what they purchase, retail consolidation around major brick and mortar, omnichannel and e-commerce-focused players continues on the larger scale. Yet, at same time the consumer product world has been subject to fragmentation in part because consumer purchasing priorities have changed under the influence of e-commerce. Endless aisles and limited barriers to entry facilitate that fragmentation, and even curated assortments are drawn from huge product inventories on e-commerce websites.

One result has been a reconsideration of manufacturing in full and in part as vendors support more expansive online product presentations supported by broader and, necessarily, shallower inventories that shift with demand. One way suppliers are ensuring they can respond to and even stay ahead of consumer demand online is by shortening supply lines including adapting or adding U.S. manufactur-

ing capabilities.

Made in the USA, at its core, is a manufacturing issue, but attached ancillary considerations abound and revivifying sagging industrial sectors is only one part of the story. Companies interested in U.S. manufacturing can today tap an emerging class of producer, which may have begun as maker businesses. On the flip side, many long-time manufacturers have leveraged their U.S. presence effectively.

In the plastic storage business, Sterilite is a significant presence having added multiple factories across the United States while a more narrowly focused player, United Solutions, is taking a more specific approach to the market while building on its own manufacturing traditions. In growing, they, like other manufacturers in the U.S., have also been developing talent and investing in skills that have sometimes become scarce during a period of industry decline in the country. At least one retailer is contributing as well.

Just weeks ago, Walmart announced that the company would expand its Live Better U educational benefits program to include in-demand skilled trade and digital education. LBU supports working adult learners among Walmart employees, targeting degree completion. Julie Murphy, evp/people at Walmart U.S., said that today's economic climate has only added urgency to the need for practical training and education opportunities for Americans, especially those who do not fit the historic profile of a fulltime student. In adding digital courses and skilled trades to its education benefit, Walmart is providing employees access to more in-demand skills so they can advance careers with the retailer or elsewhere.

Raela Ripaldi, a spokesperson for Penn Foster, which, in partnership with another adult education specialist, Guild, is working with Live Better U, explained that Walmart employees in the program have several skilled trade learning choices: HVACR Technician, Residential Electrician, Plumber, Construction Trades, Facilities Maintenance and Industrial Maintenance.

In that and other efforts, Made in the USA is evolving as a designation and an issue that is more complex but also more vibrant and, potentially, healthier in its prospects. **HWE** 

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# HOME

# Made In USA GALLERY



The new reversible
Dexas Prep-Tech
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variety of tablets, pads
and smart phones,
all at correct viewing
angles. It also features
a deep juice well for
catching any run-off
while carving meats
and protecting smart
devices.



Meco grills, including its Walk-A-Bout model, are made in Tennessee.





GelPro's Comfort Rug is said to be an accent rug version of the company's comfort mats. The rug is designed for consumers looking for decorative and functional solutions for their floors at home. It features a removable and washable rug that fits over a comfort mat, and comes in 15 patterns and an array of colors.

The cast-aluminum
Brilliance Bundt pan set
from Nordic Ware features
10-cup, 5-cup and sixportion "bundlette" sizes.
The non-stick-coated set
has a \$142 suggested retail
price and comes with a
lifetime warranty. Each pan
is also offered separately.





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endors were asked to give added weight to merchandising creativity, trend and marketing astuteness, attention to detail, openness to risk, flexibility, relationship building and the ability to deliver a profitable program for both the vendors and retailer while providing value to consumers.

Extra consideration in the selection of this year's Impact Merchants was given to those helping guide vendors through the coronavirus pandemic.

These are merchants whose dedication, innovation and productive track records are difficult to ignore.

One thing this year's Impact Merchants share is a vote of respect by their vendors. In today's unpredictable retail environment, that vote really counts.

# 2020 Impact Merchants

Jay Cunnigham   T.J.MAXX/MARSHALLS     20
Adam Gregory TARGET
Karen Rapier WALMART
Elena Weckerle ULTA BEAUTY
Ryan Yarnell MEIJER
Deb Danielson TARGET
Sarah Dipietro MACY'S
Jeff Branz WAYFAIR
Taylor Martinez COSTCO
Rachel Tsupros WAYFAIR
Korey Reed WALMART
Suzette Johnson AAFES
Becky Blake WALMART
Gretchen Dexter EVERYTHING KITCHENS 26
David LeClair STAPLES

# **Vendors Praise TJX's Cunningham As A Strong** Ally To Housewares



Cunningham

Kitchenware Buyer

# T-J-MOX Marshalls.

With a career spanning more than 30 years at TJX and a reputation to match, Jay Cunningham has been recognized by kitchenware vendors as a 2020 Impact Merchant

As a kitchenware buyer responsible for kitchen tools, gadgets, as well as flatware, cookware and bakeware, Cunningham's versatility and multi-category knowledge have helped him build a reputation of being a strong ally to the housewares industry.

Cunningham began his career at TJX in 1986 and has since been a buyer for multiple categories, including children's basics and accessories, boy's apparel, and toys. His experience navigating trends and challenges in categories outside of housewares has helped give him a strong point of view of the TJX customer's shopping habits.

Today, Cunningham buys for more than 3,000 U.S. T.J. Maxx and Marshalls stores. His ability to trend spot, merchandise and plan programs is one of the many reasons vendors praised his dedication to the housewares industry.

In addition, his range of experience with creative merchandising, inventory management, forecasting, and his strengths in multi-channel retail, proved to be a welcomed support by vendors in the last few months as the country faced the uncertainty of the pandemic.

While the company, which was forced to temporarily close stores amid the crisis and reported an unexpected loss for the first quarter due to the closures, it was quickly able to regroup, reopen stores and its e-commerce channels, putting plans in place to welcome shoppers back.

-Lauren DeBellis

## **Gregory Maximizes The Value-Focused Storage Category For Target**



Adam Gregory

Senior Buyer, Merchandising



In the midst of a roiling market, Target has done pretty well for itself this year, one in which it has made renewed efforts in storage, and Adam Gregory has been an important part of the effort.

Target has, for a long time, explored how it can maximize the storage category in its stores, going well beyond simple tubs and shelving. The company has introduced everything from the most basic stow-away merchandise to closet systems, and has given consumers a low-cost alternative to the more elaborate variations on similar goods found in specialty retailers.

In store, Target has given storage the space and variety necessary to establish itself as a value-focused destination for the category. Online, Target enhances its selection. The materials that it offers in storage products range from acacia wood to resin to woven fibers, and give consumers wide ranging options in style as well as function. On its website, Target offers storage products across a range of departments. How Target presents its storage products across categories not only gives consumers a sense of how much it can offer but also the ability to shop efficiently, further underscoring its commitment to the category.

As a contributor to Target storage operations, one vendor noted, Gregory has been consistently professional in his dealings and works with his vendor partners on terms of respect. He is collaborative and provides exceptional feedback. His product knowledge is excellent as is his understanding of factors such as market dynamics, consumer purchases and how the retail market behaves as well as how segmentation and trends influence it.

The long-time Target buyer has the goods and knowledge to claim the designation Impact Merchant.

-Mike Duff

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At Cuisinart, we pride ourselves on knowing what our customers want next, and then creating the highest quality version. Our innovative Cuisinart® AirFryer Toaster Oven is an overnight sales success because today's consumers want a product that does it all, including 7 functions and the ability to create food that's healthier and delicious.

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AirFryer





TOA-28
Compact AirFryer Dig
Toaster Oven To

TOA-65 Digital AirFryer Toaster Oven





# Walmart's Rapier Puts The Focus On Understanding The Kitchen Electrics Consumer



Karen Rapier

Senior Merchant/Senior Buyer



In less than two years, Karen Rapier has established herself as a force to be reckoned with within Walmart's kitchen electrics category.

This versatile executive, who industry sources praise as intelligent and energetic, became senior merchant/senior buyer in October 2018, after serving as vp/financial planning and allocation at J.C. Penney for a year.

"She has been super involved, even though she is relatively new as a buyer," said one kitchen appliance supplier. "She's aggressive, she's smart and she's really going after the business."

Rapier previously had been with Walmart for eight years, holding positions in home, outdoor living, consumer electronics and apparel, including senior director and director, merchandise planning; senior buyer; senior planning manager; and buyer.

Rapier focuses on consumers. "At Walmart, we always keep the customer at the center of all decisions," she said. "Identifying key trends within each business is critical to ensuring that we uphold our promise to the customer and exceed their expectations. Newness and innovation continue to drive the kitchen electrics category at Walmart, as well as the continued trust that we build with our customers through the high quality products we offer."

Industry executives said one of Rapier's strengths is working with suppliers on development— a skill that proved valuable during the COVID-19 crisis. "She's very collaborative, in spite of the challenges of not being able to work face-to-face during the pandemic," noted one supplier. "We've put together some very big programs during this time."

Rapier pointed out, "Understanding the customer and adapting in a dynamically changing environment is key every day. That focus has been even more important during the COVID-19 crisis to identify our customers' shifting priorities and respond quickly. It has also been important to listen and understand the challenges facing our suppliers, and to collaborate together on ways to overcome obstacles in order to deliver to our customers in a very critical time."

—Donna Boyle Schwartz

# Communication Key To Establishing Personal Care Partnerships For Weckerle



Elena Weckerle

Senior Brand Manager



Ulta Beauty is making the world a prettier place, and a driving force in the personal care appliance business is senior brand manager Elena Weckerle.

Although Weckerle has been in her position for less than two years, industry executives said she is a forward-thinking leader and a masterful marketer who, "communicates effectively and frequently with vendors."

Weckerle noted, "To me, communication is critical for professional success. In this year, it's proven to be that much more important. As we navigate COVID-19, my team and I continue to lean into our established vendor relationships and the open communications we have in place. We've always valued these partnerships and regularly communicate with them so additional touchpoints during this time were welcome. Keeping lines open and updates transparent have proven successful for years and we will never sway from that core value at Ulta Beauty. This year, we've reinforced the strength of these relationships and also opened new lines to work together and collectively find creative solutions that work for all."

Weckerle brings a diverse background in marketing and brand management, including stints with Blistex, Bosch, Land O'Lakes and Kraft. She began her career in advertising.

One of the largest beauty retailers, Ulta carries 500-plus brands. "It's one of the few beauty retailers to sell both mass-market and prestige products in one place, a tremendous differentiator," said a supplier. "Newness is a big focus."

Weckerle is responsible for a respected private label line. "At Ulta Beauty, we keep our guests at the center of all we do," Weckerle asserted. "This rings true in my work as my team and I create products for the Ulta Beauty Collection. We spend a lot of time thinking about user experience— everything from packaging, to directions, to actual product use— always keeping the guest needs and wants top-of-mind, knowing we want to make products our guests will love and enjoy day after day."

"She drives one of the largest planograms in the personal care appliance category," noted one supplier. "She has increased the department size and put Ulta on the leading edge of technology."

—Donna Boyle Schwartz



# Relationship Building Critical To Yarnell's Housewares Success At Meijer



Ryan Yarnell

Buyer, Housewares

# meijer

According to vendors polled by HOMEWORLD BUSINESS, Ryan Yarnell, housewares buyer at Meijer, has been critical to successes with the Meijer brand because of his relationship building as well as his focus on creating sales opportunities even when one may not be obvious. These and other attributes have landed him to a spot on the list of 2020 Impact Merchants.

"Ryan exhibits outside-of-the-box thinking to drive results at Meijer within the bakeware/cookware categories. Whether it be pet month, Fourth of July or key baking and cooking season, he is always on the lookout for up and coming trends," said one vendor.

Yarnell has years of housewares knowledge, starting his career as a buyer at Kmart in 2004. From there, he moved on to Sears Holdings Corp., also as a buyer, and then joined the team as a buyer at Meijer in 2006. He was then promoted to planning manager in 2014 and was named the retailer's housewares buyer in 2018.

Those who nominated Yarnell echoed his ability to form relationships with manufacturers as well as his keen ability to plan thoughtfully as a reason they enjoy working with him as a buyer. His persistence in growing a business sustainably over time has also been an asset to manufacturers that are looking to increase business with the Meijer retail brand.

"He makes the relationship with Meijer feel like a partnership, rather than a business model, which makes working with him exciting and productive," noted one vendor.

Another vendor noted that Yarnell's forecasting ability and extra attention to market trends has helped to identify increased sales opportunities and has also allowed them to get ahead on product development themselves.

"Fantastic ability to identify new trends, future opportunities and adjust merchandise flow based on increased volume," said the vendor.

-Emily Cappiello

# Danielson Instrumental In Shaping Target's Omnichannel Sales Strategies



**Deb Danielson** 

Director of Merchandising

# target

Target garners kudos in the kitchen appliance category, and most industry executives credit Deb Danielson's visionary leadership and emphasis on branded merchandise as being key factors in the chain's success.

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Danielson is making her second appearance as an Impact Merchant. Danielson has been with Target for more than 12 years, and has been instrumental in developing the retailer's business strategy both in stores as director of merchandising as well as online, as director of merchandising and as a senior buyer for Target.com.

Danielson received accolades for her ingenuity and astute approach to the small appliance business, which includes a focus on upscale brands, including KitchenAid, Cuisinart, Keurig, DeLonghi, Zwilling/J.A. Henckels and Nespresso, as well as industry stalwarts such as Black + Decker, Hamilton Beach, Oster, George Foreman, Sunbeam and Crock Pot. Target also has a broad assortment of popular newer brands, including Instant Pot, Ninja and Nutribullet, and is enjoying success with its own branded collections, including the back-to-basics, everyday housewares line Made By Design.

Target in general and Danielson in particular were praised for creating a seamless shopping experience for consumers between online and in-store sales.

"Their departments seem to showcase creativity and an approach to merchandising driving omnichannel success within their appropriate responsibilities," noted one kitchen appliance manufacturer.

Other suppliers cited Target's creative approach to holiday merchandising as driving sales success.

More recently, Target was commended for its approach to the global pandemic: "Target and Walmart were the first to respond [to the crisis] with strong direction and increased forecasts," noted one kitchen appliance maker. "They quickly saw a shift to more moderately priced items during this pandemic, priced below \$50. They understood that their customers are managing their finances closely and will gravitate to lower priced goods. Making sure they have inventory on these items has been a strong push."

—Donna Boyle Schwartz



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## **Dipietro Balances Omnichannel Strategies In Changing Marketplace**



#### Sarah Dipietro

Omni Buyer, Fine & Casual China, Dinnerware, Outdoor & Table Linens



Sarah Dipietro quickly gained a reputation as a creative partner after stepping into her role at Macy's as omni buyer for dinnerware in mid-2018. Most recently, she took on the casual china department at the retailer as well and was noted for her swift and focused diligence amid the COVID pandemic. For these and other reasons, Dipietro has been named a 2020 HOMEWORLD BUSINESS Impact Merchant.

Dipietro began her career at Macy's as a merchandise assistant focused on fashion and jewelry in 2010. And since then she has been an assistant/associate buyer for the brand's digital buying team in a variety of categories, including flatware, candy & trim, as well as bedding.

And while she is rather new in her role as an omnichannel buyer for the casual china department at Macy's, tabletop vendors said she has jumped right in, formulating strategies that could effectively be executed.

In addition, vendors stated that throughout the pandemic and despite a lack of support staff, Dipietro has kept in constant contact with companies to keep the business going. She also creatively planned ways for vendors to partner on strategies to offer value to Macy's customers while driving incremental sales and cost shipments.

As Macy's continues to shift strategies and its approach to retail, buyers such as Dipietro, who can offer up strength in forecasting, inventory management, visual merchandising, as well as creativity and focus amidst challenging times are sure to be a benefit to the retail brand.

—I auren DeBellis

# **Branz Builds Business As Wayfair Manages Sales Surge From Home Consumer**



Jeff Branz

Senior Category Manager



The past few months have been exciting for Wayfair and Jeff Branz has been a critical part of the team that has helped the company meet customer needs for furniture during a period in the business when addressing their homes was very much an immediate consideration.

Branz, as a vendor described him, is a top-ofthe-field merchant, and at a time when Wayfair had the advantage of a coronavirus-related surge in interest. He helped the company and his colleagues as they built on the opportunity circumstances afforded in demonstrating to consumers all that Wayfair could do for them in improving their homes.

As Wayfair representatives have shared with HomeWorld Business and Niraj Shah, company co-founder, co-chairman and CEO has announced publicly, Wayfair has seen a surge in sales, with some segments generating especially deep interest, including home office and outdoor furniture, yet also with pretty much the whole range of products the company offers getting more attention and delivering more revenue.

Branz has made an impression, the supplier said, with a transparent style of vendor management that makes working with him easy. Suppliers can count on him for quick turnaround and effective networking as he strives to drive key initiatives with the range of parties that need to contribute for successful outcomes. His positive attitude and partnership have prompted appreciation.

Branz joined Wayfair in mid-2018 and has made an impression. In doing so, and helping Wayfair make the most out of an extraordinary period in its history, he's earned kudos as a 2020 Impact Merchant.

-Mike Duff

# **Newcomer Martinez Adapting To Costco's Winning Home Environment Strategies**



**Taylor Martinez** 

Assistant Buyer



Costco is known as a go-to destination for consumers looking to stock up on everything from food to floor care, and a relatively new assistant buyer, Taylor Martinez, is attracting attention in the home environment and personal care appliance categories.

An eight-year Costco employee, Martinez took on the role of assistant buyer in March, just before the COVID-19 crisis erupted. But this ambitious and eager newcomer is getting credit for keeping in touch with vendors and working on programs throughout the pandemic.

"He's young, he's motivated and he is really enthusiastic about working with us [and other manufacturers] to develop the business," said one home environment supplier. "We think he is someone who has a bright future in the industry."

Martinez has been a full-time employee at Costco since 2012, holding positions as an inventory control specialist and stocker prior to getting a B.S. degree in marketing.

Suppliers said Martinez is already approaching the business creatively, and "seems to have an innate understanding of how to blend the in-store and online environments," one home environment executive said.

"Taylor is very personable, and interested in working with people," another industry source commented.

Costco's home environment assortment currently covers a range of categories that have seen an uptick in demand during the pandemic, including air purifiers and filters, humidifiers, and vacuums.

"While most consumers were stocking up on groceries and essentials for the crisis, Costco also has been doing a good business on our products," said a home environment supplier. "People read stories in the news [about humidifiers and air purifiers] and they have been going out and buying them."

And although Martinez hasn't been in the job long enough to take credit for the current merchandise assortment, industry executives said it is only a matter of time before he makes his mark, calling him "definitely someone to watch going forward."

—Donna Boyle Schwartz



## Tsupros A Valued Partner To Guide Online Tabletop Sales Opportunities



### **Rachel Tsupros**

Senior Category Manager, Tabletop



As the housewares industry collectively navigated the challenges the COVID-19 pandemic presented, the relationship between vendor and retailer was more critical than ever. Buyers that were able to step in and help vendors navigate the uncertainty became a welcomed partner. Rachel Tsupros, senior category manager, tabletop, at Wayfair is one of those partners and for that, she has been named a 2020 HOMEWORLD BUSINESS Impact Merchant.

In the early stages of the pandemic, as consumers were instructed to shelter in place, Wayfair noticed an uptick in online sales. With many consumers finding Wayfair for the first time, online buying presented a unique opportunity for the retailer.

The tabletop category especially emerged as an area of interest as consumers were eager to present their home cooked meals in special ways for their families and on social media. Vendors in the category said they have appreciated Tsupros' creativity and business acumen during that time and to date, showing compassion for her vendors and at the same time pushing them to do their very best for her consumers.

Tsupros previously worked as an assistant buyer at American Eagle, as well as an associate buyer at Dick's Sporting Goods. She made the move to Wayfair in August of 2018 and has since earned a reputation as a valued collaborator.

Tabletop vendors that have worked with Tsupros have said that during the COVID crisis, she has been a focused and strong business partner. She has worked collaboratively with vendors to manage the surge in near-term demand, while focusing on establishing a foundation for future growth.

-Lauren DeBellis

## Reed Steps Up To Keep Evolving Lighting Category On Track For Walmart



#### **Korey Reed**

Senior Product Development & Sourcing Manager Lighting, Clocks & Crafts



Lighting has been an evolving category at Walmart and vendors said Korey Reed has helped keep it advancing before and through the COVID-19 pandemic.

One vendor pointed out that Reed, who has worked in product development and sourcing, stepped up to take additional responsibilities at Walmart to cover the buyer role, and has put in the time and hard work necessary to maintain high standards. With significant dedication, the supplier said, she has kept the lighting business dynamic and effective.

Another supplier pointed out that keeping things moving has required Reed to reach out, jump into projects and keep the enterprise on an even keel. The vendor said Reed understands how to function as a partner with suppliers and maintain effective relations despite the twists and turns of navigating the COVID-19 pandemic. And she has looked to the future, identifying strong products and challenging vendors to ensure the success of the lighting department.

Reed told *HomeWorld Business*, "Navigating challenges in the supply chain was critically important early in the pandemic to ensure that we could deliver product to our customers when and how they needed it."

As the coronavirus crisis evolved, Reed said, she worked in step with the broader Walmart community to address the needs of consumers who had to adapt lifestyles to unanticipated conditions.

"As an essential retailer, Walmart has been in a unique position to provide essential products for customers throughout the pandemic," she said. "We worked with speed to ensure we had what the customer wanted when they wanted it."

The midst of the coronavirus outbreak in the U.S. isn't exactly the ideal time to accept additional responsibilities. However, Reed has embraced the challenge effectively, vendors noted. In doing so, Reed has demonstrated the professionalism and savvy to emerge as a 2020 Impact Merchant.

-Mike Duff

# Johnson Supports Military Personnel Through Her Tabletop Buying Dedication

#### **Susette Johnson**

Hometeam Tabletop Buyer: Dinnerware, Stemware, Barware, Flatware, Cutlery, Kitchen Gadgets



With the Army and Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) for the last 12 years, Susette Johnson has been known to work to bring quality products to the U.S. military personnel through her industry knowledge as well as dedication to pricing and quality. That is why she has been named a 2020 Impact Merchant.

"She continues to fight the good fight in providing great products and value to our military personnel and their families," said a vendor about Johnson

AAFES is a Department of Defense sub-agency that has provided quality, tax-free retail services and merchandise to Active Duty, Guard and Reserve members, military retirees and their families. As Hometeam tabletop buyer for the association, Johnson is tasked with purchasing for the Army Air Force Exchanges around the world, having to keep an eye on both domestic and international trends, in which her attention to detail has helped aid in her success, said a vendor.

And, noted a manufacturer, her even-keeled and positive personality allows her to continue pushing forward regardless of the circumstances, but it is complemented by her deep industry knowledge that provides her with the ability to adapt plans if necessary.

"You have to love the military; they keep up the momentum regardless of what emergency and chaos occur," the vendor said.

Johnson started at AAFES as an allocation and inventory analyst before becoming the tabletop buyer. Prior to her career at AAFES, she held positions at Zale Corporation as a merchandise analyst and Fossil as a senior planner.

—Emily Cappiello



# **Blake Wins High Marks For Merchandising Guidance As Pandemic Shaped Market**



**Becky Blake** 

Senior Buyer, Gadgets & Cutlery



Praised for her merchandising, retail and inventory management skills, kitchenware vendors have nominated Becky Blake of Walmart as a 2020 Impact Merchant.

As a senior buyer for the gadgets and cutlery categories for Walmart, Blake has been a steady partner for vendors throughout the last few months. Many have commented on her positive attitude and detail-oriented skillset.

With the company since May of 2014, Blake has a solid base of experience to share with vendors on the needs of the Walmart customer.

"Walmart has always been a customer-centric retailer," Blake said. "With the customer at the center of everything we do, we have remained focused on understanding the customer mindset to ensure we exceed their expectations on a daily basis. During the pandemic, we have continued to concentrate on anticipating what our customer expects and requires from Walmart. More than ever, we have to focus on saving people money so they can live better."

Vendors have commented that Blake always keeps on top of business trends and is therefore able to help them forecast trends and help see them through tough decisions. These abilities, said vendors, were especially helpful when they needed guidance amid the challenges the kitchenware category faces as consumer buying habits and interest shift, especially ahead of fourth quarter planning.

"At Walmart, we believe in a culture of transparency and integrity, and we value open and honest communication. To best understand upcoming consumer trends, leaders must curate and foster a diverse team empowered to engage in idea sharing and open dialogue to reflect our diverse customer base," Blake said.

—Lauren DeBellis

### **Dexter Stands Out With Her Building Brand Approach In Gourmet Housewares**



**Gretchen Dexter** 

Buyer/Vendor Manager



Gretchen Dexter's understanding of building brands, product selection and marketing opportunities, said vendors, are just a few of the reasons the buyer and vendor manager at Springfield, MO-based Everything Kitchens has been named a 2020 Impact Merchant.

While Dexter had previous experience in the working world, a marketing manager job at Direct Retail introduced her to the business side of retailing. She was in charge of direct mail marketing programs at the company until she launched her own business, Rockridge Group, in 2008. While at that group, Dexter helped launch or re-launch five brands, developed an e-commerce strategy and worked on the business side of retail.

All of this experience, said vendors, has enabled her to become a successful buyer for the independent housewares retailer, which offers more than 13,000 products from 200 kitchenware brands. However, said vendors, while the amount of product the company is responsible for is vast, Dexter seemingly goes out of her way to make even the smallest vendors feel as if they are an important part of the Everything Kitchens family.

"She is great to work with, is always willing to give a new product or brand a chance. She is enthusiastic about partnering with vendors instead of just stocking them, but is also realistic in her approach and expectations," said a manufacturer.

—Emily Cappiello

## **LeClair Navigates Pandemic Challenges While Keeping Staples Customer Top Of Mind**



David LeClair

Associate DMM Merchandising

# Staples.

The office superstore retail channel found itself in an advantageous position as the COVID-19 pandemic struck the U.S., as restrictions to personal movement caused many consumers to become remote workers. David LeClair was one of the people who helped Staples meet the challenge of a suddenly changed market dynamic.

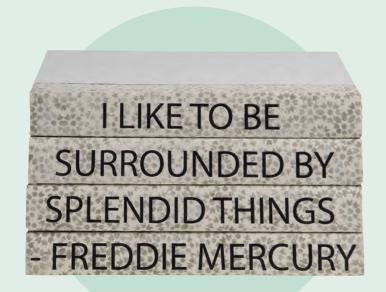
The coronavirus crisis dialed up demand for products consumers could use to develop or upgrade home offices, and, frequently, multiple home offices to outfit families for work and school. The benefit to Staples was twofold, first in sales and second in refamiliarizing consumers with the company, particularly online. Staples' website and stores got a boost when consumers began scrambling to find home office product suppliers and, as they discovered that it remained open as an essential retailer, cleaning and other products vital to sheltering at home during the outbreak.

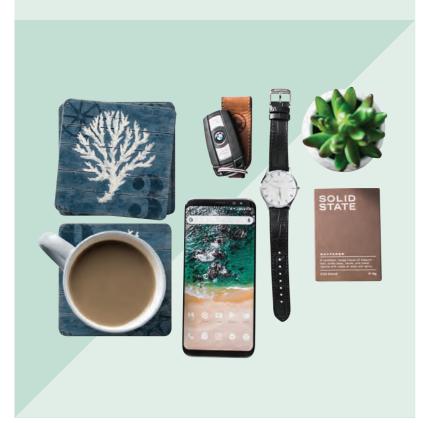
LeClair was someone suited for the circumstances because he actively takes input from suppliers and experts to use with his own close observations in making decisions, said a vendor. He is collaborative and listens to supplier input, asks questions effectively and shares information to help suppliers lend better support. In a market under the influence of the coronavirus pandemic, he remained aggressive in testing new concepts that keep the stores relevant, continuing to ensure Staples can present a relevant assortment and environment for the changing target customer.

Staples, with its recent Instacart deal and a new community-oriented store concept, needs buyers who have the wherewithal to weigh the needs of consumer, professional and small business shoppers as well as larger enterprises. With the company for more than a decade, LeClair brings to bear experience and consideration in degrees that support Staples initiatives and make him a 2020 Impact Merchant.

-Mike Duff







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# Cook & Bake



# Pandemic Propelled U.S.-Made Cookware To New Heights



By Emily Cappiello Contributing Editor

NEW YORK— While the COVID-19 pandemic was— and may continue to be— a dark cloud hanging over the U.S. economy, the crisis did have a bright spot. That bright spot was the increased demand from consumers for housewares as people were forced to spend more time at home. And, this demand not only bolstered the cookware industry as a whole, but also gave U.S.-based manufacturers more opportunities.

Cookware in and of itself has seen its share of challenges during the last few years, including tariffs that impacted U.S.-based manufacturing companies and the increased penetration of direct-to-consumer brands hitting

the market. However, the pandemic changed the perspective of consumers, vendors said, as many felt it heightened the desire to purchase domestically-made goods and to purchase them locally, if possible.

"The demand for cookware grew dramatically during quarantine and having the ability to increase real-time production to meet the increased demand was critical. I cannot imagine what we would have done if we were reliant on overseas supply with such rapid and sharp increases in demand. I do not think we would have been able to respond," said Bobby Griggs, vp/ Heritage Steel cookware.

Griggs said that while sales of his stainless steel cookware brand have continued to increase, there has also been another phenomena happeninghe recently noticed that consumers have become more concerned with where the company is manufacturing its goods.

"We are receiving a significant uptick in questions direct from the consumer inquiring about product origin. These questions are pouring in via social media and our website. I believe the Made in the U.S. sentiment amongst consumers is stronger than ever," he said.

Finex Cast Iron, which is owned by Lodge, said it bolstered its commitment to the U.S. during the pandemic, showcasing its support of the community of designers, machinists and other craftspeople in the U.S. that support the company. Michael Griffin, director of marketing, Finex, said he feels that commitment is one of the reasons the company saw an increase in sales during the pandemic, especially online.

"We have been responding to a dramatic increase in online sales. We've got a lot of people working from home and we've made several small changes to our website to accommodate the extra traffic," he said.

Matt Cavallaro, owner and principal of Nest Homeware, said that his company also made the shift to online, noting increased sales. This was done in response to many of his customers that are in the independent and specialty housewares markets, having to shut down during the pandemic.

"Our pivot was really just more to direct sales online. Retail stores took a hard hit, and we're looking forward to being able to supply those stores with our cookware as more states are trying to open up safely," he said.

While it continues to be important to tout the Made in the U.S. message, Jennifer Dalquist, evp/sales and marketing at Nordic Ware, explained that some consumers may be purchasing the products at retail without even really knowing they are supporting American manufacturing. This, she said, is due to

continued on page 32





# U.S. Bakeware Keeps Pace With Growing Demand

By Emily Cappiello Contributing Editor

NEW YORK— While Made in the U.S. has seemingly been a selling point for bakeware consumers through the years— especially in the metal bakeware category- it struck an extra deep chord with consumers this year as many hoped to boost their domestic economy during the coronavirus pandemic, vendors said.

"This pandemic certainly has made everyone more aware how buying American-made products can have a positive impact on our economy. There's no denying these challenging times have caused global supply chain disruptions, which is why American-based manufacturing is so important right now," said Chris Schwartz, president, G&S Metal.

Baking hit a high note during COVID-19, as many people were quarantined, practicing social distancing or were even under curfews. While the increase in business was good for the segment as a whole, trends began dictating bakeware sales faster than usual. This was a boon for U.S. manufacturers, as they were able to pivot to meet consumer demand, putting them in a favorable position amongst retailers.

"There's no denying these challenging times have caused global supply

continued on page 34



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# Consumer Lifestyle Shift **Energized Cookware Category**

NEW YORK- While the cookware industry has spent several years battling shifting consumer shopping preferences, changing cookware material preferences, tariffs and other challenges, it seems as if the COVID-19 pandemic breathed some new life into the segment.

Homebound consumers began evaluating their cookware as many were tasked with making several meals a day, and realized they didn't have the tools they needed. Others became more comfortable in the kitchen, experimenting with new recipes, and began researching and purchasing items that would make cooking at home easier and more authentic.

"As people continue to work from home, maybe even through the rest of the year, they will have more time to cook and bake."

---Penny Rosema, Cookware Manufacturers Association

Bakeware, on the other hand, continued to gain ground during social distancing and stay-at-home orders hit the U.S. From bread baking to fresh cookies, consumers found comfort in making fresh baked goods.

HOMEWORLD BUSINESS® recently spoke to Penny Rosema, managing director of the Cookware Manufacturers Association (CMA) about the changes she's seen since the coronavirus pandemic hit and what she predicts may be on the horizon for both cookware and bakeware going into the second half of the year.

#### HomeWorld Business: How did the coronavirus pandemic shift business in the cookware and bakeware categories?

**Penny Rosema:** Time in quarantine has given consumers more time to look at and use their cookware and bakeware. They are relearning how cost effective and easy cooking at home can be and are also finding easy, flavorful and healthy ways to cook and bake. I feel like people ended up really liking the experience of cooking and baking at home. It was forced, but then they

realized that it was also fun.

Now that their budgets are shifting and they aren't spending money on the gym, the spa or eating out, they are realizing that their old cookware doesn't look so good, or isn't doing the job. People are also looking at what they are missing.

As people continue to work from home, maybe even through the rest of the year, they will have more time to cook and bake. And the limited restaurant access, too, will continue to help cookware and bakeware sales.

#### HWB: What categories seem to be doing the best this year?

PR: Bakeware and cast iron are holding strong during the pandemic, as well as stainless steel and aluminum for some brands. The mixed metals cast iron/enamel cast iron/porcelain on steel category has dipped a little, but it's not been significant. This is perhaps a sign of the brand presence on social media, the omnichannel side of the equation of buy online/pick-up in-store, and also those sales tied to the essential service retail stores, like Target, Walmart and Costco versus a retail outlet like Macy's.

There has been a slight shift back to purchasing cookware sets, but it's unclear if this trend will hold post-pandemic. Consumers are still needing those individual pieces, though, especially for specialty recipes.

#### HWB: Do you feel that the buy online/pick-up in store option helps cookware?

PR: I think the smart cookware and bakeware brands will find ways to help those brick-and-mortar stores. There are opportunities for them to work together and get to the consumers in new and innovative ways. Smart manufactures will continue to create resources for retailers that will help the consumers have better shopping experiences. Buy online/pick-up in store will continue to be a better option for consumers, especially with the interest in curbside pick-up right now.

#### HWB: What will the next few months bring to cookware and bakeware?

PR: We track new home construction and home remodeling. Right now, there seems to be this move away from the city to the suburbs. This has the ability to continue to impact cookware and bakeware sales because people aren't going to want their old pieces in a new space.

The kitchen will also continue to be

# **CMA Names** 2020 Board **Members**

LOWELL, MI- The Cookware Manufacturers Association (CMA) has elected new board member, Mike Otterman, CEO of Lodge Manufacturing Company, and reelected three board members to serve a second three-year term: Kurt Mecray, consumer marketing manager at PPG; and Chris Welch, director of marketing at Bradshaw Home.

Former vice president, Andy Padawer, vp/sales for Groupe SEB, was elected president of the board. Padawer joined the board in 2016 and has also served as its treasurer.

"The new board will continue to lead the way on engineering standards that are used industry-wide to protect the safety of those who cook in commercial and home kitchens," said Padawer. "In this time of COVID-19, CMA is more important than ever as member companies work together to tackle the challenges of protecting our workforce, growing our markets, and keeping cookware safe."

In addition to helping cookware manufacturers navigate a post-pandemic world, the association's 2020 plans include education of retail buyers about the superior quality, reliability, and value of cookware and bakeware that adhere to CMA engineering standards.

a multi-purpose room as people cook, bake, teach and work there. People will be looking to upgrade their cookware and bakeware

As far as a return to retail shopping, we are realizing that it's going to take time for that to bounce back. All of that is still unfolding. People aren't swarming back into stores, they're a little cautious. But many retailers are in the process of shifting categories or reorganizing. There could be opportunities for growth cookware brands.

#### HWB: Where do imports and exports stand today?

**PR:** We are still watching the patterns and will have more definitive numbers in August. But right now, we are seeing a stronger pull towards American-made in a lot of categories. HWB



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# U.S. Cookware

continued from page 28 the fact that American manufacturers have been taking advantage of the void of low and no inventory that imported goods left behind.

"Because U.S. goods are largely what's in stock right now at various retailers across the country due to shorter lead times and ability to react quickly when demand surges, many Americans right now are buying U.S.made goods whether they realize it or not. They may not even appreciate how quickly American manufacturers ramped up in the face of COVID to support need, but it most certainly happened," she said.

This happy accident, though, may continue to serve the domestically-made cookware industry into the future as these consumers have the opportunity to become loyal to a brandespecially now with more frequent use.

#### **Rise At Retail**

Retailers, too, took advantage of the opportunities that U.S.-based manufacturers presented. Many brands that are made internationally face a barrage of issues, from supply chain shortage to concerns surrounding packaging and contamination.

"At the beginning of the pandemic there was a spike in support for U.S.

products based on worries—fair or not— about the safety of foreign manufactured products, particularly with China. That said I think that feeling has shifted and the support for U.S. made products now is grounded in an awareness for Americans that we need to support our neighbors in this hard time," said Will Copenhaver, vp/marketing and sales, Smithey Ironware.

Retailers also began taking advantage

of domestically-made cookware's ability to meet consumer demand quickly, looking to more homegrown companies to supply their stores, especially those who were given essential status.

Mike Otterman, president and CEO of Lodge Cast Iron, said the company was able to leverage its ability to shift its production to take advantage of sales opportunities that imported goods left.

"The coronavirus pandemic presented challenges for many brands, but being American-made has allowed us to continue serving our customers without the need to rely on an added layer of supply chain. With all of our products being made in our foundries, we're able to be nimble and adjust our production process so we can continue to supply our customers and retailers," he said.

Griggs sells Heritage Steel cookware to the independent gourmet housewares market, many of which were hit extra hard by the pandemic. Some had to close their doors completely, while others were finding creative ways to capture as many sales as possible. Griggs explained that Heritage Steel's ability to continue to provide product cemented the company as a retail partner, not just a vendor.

"Having the ability to respond to such increased demand from our independent retailers and other partners in a relatively short time frame has really proven that domestic manufacturing has great business merit," he said.

And, explained Cavallaro, there may





be an even bigger bright spot than increased sales coming out of the pandemic for U.S.-based manufactures—a better working relationship through the supply chain.

"I feel like there's really good morale amongst us all right now though, especially between vendors and end companies. We all know we can get through this, and we all want to do well for each other. The bottom line is that consumers still want good products. And they have more time to consider buying them than they have in a while," he said.

But while the Made in the U.S. message has been a boon for business in recent months, noted Lodge's Otterman, there will be challenges ahead for the cookware industry, including increased competition as people remain committed to cooking and baking at home for the foreseeable future.

"With a rise in at-home cooking comes a rise in new brands to the cookware market. American-made companies are having to differentiate themselves now more than ever to stand out and reach their core customers. It's hard to say what the future holds with so many uncertainties, but we know there will always be a need for home cookware and bakeware," he said.

And, added Smithey's Copenhaver, the continued uncertainty surrounding the pandemic, the economy and disposable income is still a threat to the cookware industry.

"Uncertainty is by far the biggest challenge to our industry. We just do not know what tomorrow will bring-hard hit areas may be recovering while new areas face coronavirus spikes and new shut downs. Demand has not deserted cookware— how we supply that demand is the question of the day," he said.





CARSON, CA— As Clipper Corp. continues to invest in its Viking line of cookware, the company is tapping into design trends for its latest cookware release. The new line utilizes the combination of black and copper for a mixed-materials look, but has also been built for performance, the company said.

The new Viking cookware collection is 3-ply, said the company. The exterior is aluminum and features an aluminum core to expedite heating and ensure perfectly even heat distribution, while the interior is non-reactive, surgical grade stainless steel. This was developed, said Clipper, to not affect the flavor of food and ensures easy cleanup, although the cookware is dishwasher safe as well. An additional inner layer of aluminum alloy also contributes to the efficiency of the cookware.

The new Viking line of cookware also enjoys an embedded induction plate at the bottom of each pan which increases the versatility of the cookware, allowing home chefs to use the pieces on gas, electric, ceramic or induction cooktops. The cookware is also oven safe up to 450°F, the company said.

Other features of the line include vented glass lids to help to prevent boil-overs and make it easy to see the progress of the meal; flared rims ensure drip free pouring; integrated measuring markings on the inside of the pans require less use of measuring cups; and full-cast stainless steel handles are securely attached with stainless steel rivets and are designed to stay cool.

Additionally, the company said, the Viking ergonomically designed handles are PVD coated with an elegant copper look providing the perfect accent to the matte black exterior.

The line will be available beginning in September. Currently, the black and copper cookware collection will be available at specialty and independent retailers as well as online via Wayfair and Amazon. It will be available as an 11-piece set only and will retail for \$699.99.





# U.S. Bakeware

 $continued from\ page\ 28$ 

chain disruptions, which is why American-based manufacturing is so important right now. As an American-based manufacturer, we can meet quicker turnaround times for a retailer that would have otherwise been a challenge for an importer," noted Schwartz.

Jennifer Dalquist, svp/sales and marketing for Nordic Ware, said that during the pandemic, imports from around the world were disrupted, causing low inventory and even empty shelves for some retailers. Manufacturing domestically enabled the cookware and bakeware company to capture increased dollars as retailers began looking to fill the void quickly.

"Being made in the U.S. was critical. It allowed us to not only ship on immediate notice to retailers as their demand shifted, but also meant that we were able to procure raw materials and ramp up production to keep pace with need on extremely short notice," said Dalquist.

John Bundy III, managing director of USA Pan, said that the company also benefitted from being made in the U.S. as retailers struggled to fill their shelves. However, he said that Americans have been exercising their pride-of-place a bit more often, as many looked to support local economies and local businesses.

"At USA Pan, we have always realized the importance to buy domestically and support the American worker. We have noticed the consumer leaning towards this sentiment more than the past decade. Going by numbers alone during the pandemic this has absolutely been validated and we are doing everything we can to keep up with consumer demand," he said.

Nordic Ware's Dalquist noticed this as well, especially as many people faced unemployment and other hardships during COVID-19. Those who were willing and able stepped in to use their funds to support small businesses and many went out of their way to purchase domestically-made products.

"When there's an economic downturn and the un-

employment rate skyrockets, nearly everyone knows someone—friend, family member, neighbor—who is furloughed, unemployed or under-employed, and it serves as a strong reminder of why we must buy domestically made goods and support our own country's economy," she said.

As for the future, vendors noted that the coronavirus pandemic ended up highlighting holes in the supply chain and exaggerating lead times, something that adding more U.S. manufacturers to the mix will alleviate in the future— if retailers take advantage of the opportunity.

"Retailers are realizing that their supply chains are too long— waiting months for goods to arrive from overseas is a painful but effective reminder for retail buying and sourcing teams to be broadly sourced with a nice variety of both domestic and import items, such that you have resources in place when demand shifts rapidly," said Dalquist.

Bundy, too, has seen an increase in demand and hopes it will keep up after the pandemic, a prediction he feels will hold true. Many would-be home cooks and bakers learned how to flex their chops in the kitchen and become less intimidated by trying new things. While he credits being made in the U.S. for an increase in sales during the pandemic, it will be about increased consumer demand going forward.

"Our biggest challenge has been adapting to keep up with demand. It has been a fun challenge. If there is a silver lining in this whole pandemic, it's the fact that families have been drawn closer together for home cooked meals. We're all ready to get back to normal as a nation, but let's make the most of what's in front of us for now," he said.

Schwartz also noted that the rest of the year looks good for domestically-manufactured bakeware, especially since the coronavirus crisis has the supply chain reevaluating its procedures and processes.

"I see a positive future for U.S.-based manufacturing. We've seen how this pandemic can cause a ripple effect and impact an entire industry. By becoming less reliant on outside resources, we can be more prepared for unforeseen circumstances, like this pandemic, in the future," he said. **EWE** 



# **Dine & Entertain**

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# U.S. Tabletop Vendors Facing Challenges And Opportunities



By Lauren DeBellis Senior Editor

NEW YORK- It's no question that 2020 has been a rollercoaster year for the housewares industry. As we look at the tabletop category, those that have factories here in the U.S. have been affected on many levels but all have shined a spotlight on the importance of supporting and maintaining products made here in the U.S.

In fact, vendors that HOMEWORLD BUSINESS spoke to reported that they are witnessing an uptick in interest in Made in USA products for the table, from retail customers. Many stated this rapid shift, while certainly started ahead of the pandemic, has become

one of the mandates to come out of the last few months, as American consumers have become more wary of imported goods, especially those coming from China. The support for American goods and the people who are employed to make them is at an all-time high.

"Today, people want to know that they're supporting community and the embodiment of workers here in America," said Rich Brinkman, vp/marketing, Fiesta Tableware Company. "We employ over 350 people at our factories in West Virginia and Ohio. The factory has been owned by the same family for five generations."

That longstanding tradition of man-

ufacturing its tableware here in the U.S. and employing U.S. workers has certainly given the company an edge with consumers looking to keep their purchases stateside. Much of the company's production still requires old-fashioned techniques by



skilled craftspeople, as well as highly automated processes in the company's West Virginia factory. This combination allows the company to customize products, and also enables the company to be quick and nimble to meet customer demands.

"Our shipping time is exponentially quicker. We can have product delivered in a matter of days after it's produced," said Brinkman.

Such efficiency has proven to be a welcome part of the relationship between vendors that make their products in the U.S. and retail customers, especially over the last year as the housewares industry endured imposed tariffs on overseas goods as well as supply chain disruptions. Such obstacles is one reason domestic tabletop vendors said they find retailers relying on them for more robust programs, as well as private label and exclusives.

"We are indeed seeing a heightened interest in Made in USA products from our customers and consumers alike," said Tena Hall, vp/consumer goods sales, Arc Americas. "Being a U.S. manufacturer we are able to offer additional advantages to our customers on many levels from being a U.S. manufacturing supplier that is environmentally conscientious to providing faster time to market and shorter lead times, ultimately benefiting the end consumer."

Jack Kontes, Arc Americas's vp/ brand and product, added that in addition to the business oriented benefits Arc's Made in USA status provides, it also gives customers and consumers the reassurance they are getting qual-

> ity products that are ethically made.

"There is also an increasing segment looking to purchase products from domestic manufacturers for the virtuous circle it creates within continued on page 40

Arc points to faster time to market and shorter lead times as U.S.-made advantages.



# Gadbois Takes Helm Of Corelle As Disney Series Debuts

CHICAGO - While the tabletop category continues to forge ahead amid the uncertainty of the pandemic, Corelle Brands is building the foundation for its future. The company recently appointed Ben Gadbois as CEO and offered up limited edition licensed Disney-collections from Corelle and Pyrex.

The company, which is backed by Cornell Capital, named Gadbois to the position of president and CEO in June. He succeeds Kenneth Wilkes, the company's former president and CEO, who has retired. Gadbois also joins the company's board of directors, of which Wilkes will still serve.

"We believe that Ben is a proven leader who will position Corelle Brands for further growth," said Joanna Reiss,

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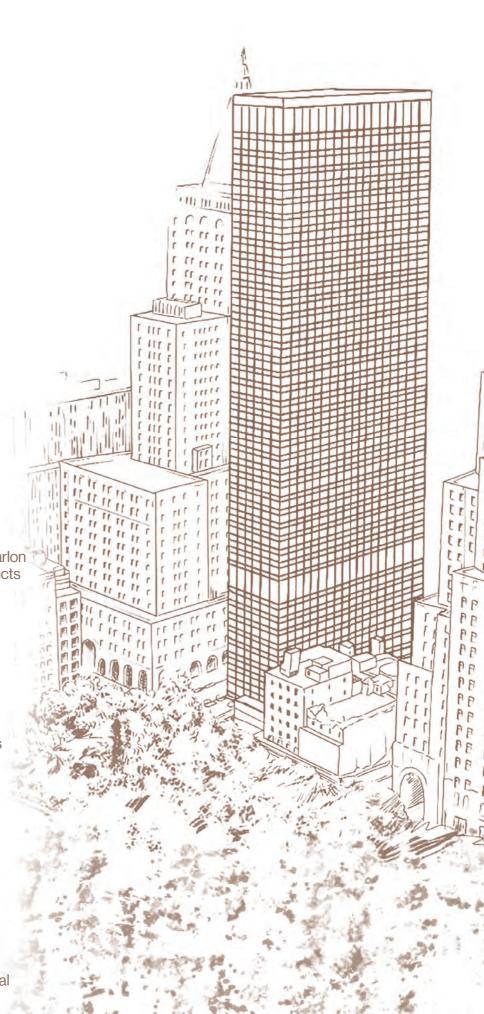
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### Corelle Brands

continued from page 36 director of Corelle Brands and partner at Cornell Capital. "He has deep consumer brands expertise and a track record of value creation, transformative leadership, operational excellence and financial outperformance."

Gadbois has more than two decades of experience driving growth for leading consumer brands. He was most recently the global president and COO of Spin Master and previously spent 13 years in various leadership roles at Newell Brands.

In addition, Corelle Brands recently teamed up with Disney for two limited edition licensed lines of Corelle dinnerware and Pyrex glass food storage. Both of the collections were offered up to consumers for a limited amount of time the brands' websites.

The licensed line of Corelle dinnerware features Star Wars fan-favorite character designs in different shapes and sizes of Corelle dishes and Pyrex food storage. The company stated that similar to Star Wars, Corelle and Pyrex are timeless brands and the company felt a collaboration with the iconic Star Wars brand would be a good fit.

The Corelle dinnerware collection features classic Star Wars character

artwork adorned on lunch and snack plates. The collaboration also expanded into the Pyrex food storage container assortment in 4-piece and 6-piece sets. The various sizes and patterns will feature the characters such as Child from The Mandalorian, Darth Vader and others. The products were launched on Corelle.com and Pyrex. com in time for May 4, a nod to the popular "May the Fourth Be With You" holiday that Star Wars fans celebrate.

More recently, the company collaborated with Disney on a licensed assortment of Pyrex glass food storage, showcasing Mickey Mouse. The special edition collection of glass food storage comes in both round and rectangle shapes and are available in sizes ranging from one cup to seven cups. They feature an array of playful patterns that capture Disney's Mickey Mouse.

Of the collection, the company said that the collaboration with Disney allows the company to bring one of the world's most recognizable characters into the homes of fans, creating magical moments in the kitchen. As such, the bright patterns offer a pop of color and a pop of joy, capturing familiar Mickey moments, including his classic catchphrase, "Oh boy!" The collection was launched at Pyrex.com in June and is available while supplies last.





Corelle has introduced a Pyrex glass food storage line featuring Mickey Mouse.

# BRYMATE

### BrüMate's Winesulator set includes a 25-ounce insulated wine canteen and two 14-ounce Uncork'd wine tumblers with lids. The bottle and tumblers are designed to keep wine at an optimal temperature.



Vinglacé's tumbler can be used for a variety of tasks such as holding water, lemonade, wine or cocktails. It features an inner glass component with an outer steel case for insulation.

# Thermal Evolution

# Beverageware Designed For Adult Drinks Keeps Category Hot

There's a reason thermal beverageware continues to be one of the fastest growing categories in housewares. The category saw an approximate \$8 million sales growth last year, according to the 2020 Housewares Census. Thermal beverageware is designed to hold hot or cold drinks such as water, coffee and tea. However, today, thermal vessels that can take the user's favorite adult drinks on the go (or the backyard) have emerged as a hot gift.



Oggi's Champagne Tumbler is designed to resemble a champagne flute, for sipping champagne, prosecco and other bubbly libations. It includes a clear sip lid and has a 6-ounce capacity.



Snowfox's insulated steel martini glasses are made for those that prefer a shaken or stirred cocktail. They are available with stems and without and are designed to resemble the classic shape they are named for.



EcoVessel's Boss Beer Growler can hold 64 ounces, or half a gallon of beer or other beverage and is tripleinsulated to keep liquids cold or hot. It also features an infuser to add fresh fruit flavors.

Corkcicle's Hybrid Canteen marries a glass bottle with the technology of thermal stainless steel insulation for a mixed medium hydration vessel. It is available in a variety of colors.



# U.S. Tabletop

continued from page 36 our domestic economy. They feel it is a way they can directly impact our economy and communities," he said.

Yet with the advantages comes the

challenges, vendors stated, which often include a consumer reluctancy to spend a premium price that often comes along with American-made goods. The budget conscious U.S. consumer seeks out both a fair price and quality.

"In every webinar, in every meeting,

all over the Internet— all we're hearing is that everyone wants products that are made in the USA, but they want them at an affordable pricepoint," said Brinkman. "We can offer that to them. We provide a durable product that provides a great value for the price. That durability has allowed families to pass down their Fiesta from generation to generation."

And those traditions in the manufacturing of such American-made tabletop have been tested in recent months. Some factories here, in the U.S., serving both established and smaller tabletop vendors halted production or temporarily reduced employees early on, such as the case with Arc Americas and its factory in Millville, NJ.

Hall stated that when the factory did return to full capacity, being able to operate while maintaining social distancing standards posed challenges but by staying flexible and remaining diligent with social distancing standards, it has been able to return to near normal operations.

Other U.S. tabletop manufacturers have not been able to survive the recent pandemic intact. Libbey halted production at its Toledo, OH, and Shreveport, LA, glassware factories and is currently undergoing a Chapter 11 reorganization with hopes of getting the business back up and running.

Meanwhile, Lenox closed its Kinston, NC, bone china factory in April, as a result of the downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The 218,000-square-foot Kinston factory was built in 1989 and according to Lenox, was the only fine bone china factory in the U.S.



# Tervis Taps Into Consumer Thirst For U.S.-Made

SARASOTA, FL— Vendors such as Tervis have been able to tap into consumer's U.S.-made and sustainable preferences in order to capitalize on the desire of consumers to purchase hydration vessels that tick all of these boxes.

"During trying times, America has always come together to help one another even when many are in need of help themselves," said Harper Bean, e-commerce marketing director, Tervis. "Tervis has seen an increased demand and show of support for American products. Being an American manufacturer, we can quickly pivot our strategies and a great example of this was helping to keep our frontline workers hydrated during this pandemic. We were able to donate \$450,000 of products to those helping fight this virus."

The company is also gearing up to launch a new collection of stainless steel tumblers, designed with leak-proof wide mouth bottles. According to the company, the new feature was implemented in order to provide consumers with a fully protected drinking surface in order to keep it clean. In addition, the company said it is supporting healthy hydration efforts with larger capacities and longer insulation times.

The new stainless steel Tervis Wide Mouth will be available in three sizes: 24-, 32- and 40-ounce capacities and comes with two types of lids. It will come in seven solid colors, as well as the Tervis designs Life is good and Ivory Ella; and all 30 NFL teams and 30 collegiate licenses. The line will have a suggested retail price range of \$24.99 to \$39.99.



Tervis' new stainless steel Wide Mouth tumbler collection.

The Modern Table Inspires Villeroy & Boch Dinnerware

Dine & Entertain Homeworld Business | J

MONROE TOWNSHIP, NJ— Villeroy & Boch has expanded its signature dinnerware collections, with new offerings for the modern table.

Dining at home has become more common than ever and a comforting ritual consumers are embracing during these uncertain times and with that, consumers are paying closer attention to their tablescapes.

The company has added new serveware to its La Classica collection of premium bone porcelain tableware and stainless flatware. The new pieces include a cold meat fork; serving fork; serving spoon; gravy ladle; soup ladle; pie server; and sugar spoon.

The premium bone porcelain dinnerware collection is available in all white, La Classica Nuova, as well as a gold and white geometric design with delicate motifs, La Classica Contura. The dinnerware, flatware and serveware are dishwasher safe, the company said.

In addition, Villeroy & Boch added a new 16-piece set to its Royal collection of premium bone porcelain dinnerware. The classic Royal collection features a modest form and timeless design, the company said. The new Royal 16-piece dinner set includes four dinner plates; four salad plates; four rim soup bowls; and four mugs.







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# Kitchen Prep

Kitchen Tools • Countertop Kitchenware

# U.S. Base Supports Kitchenware **Vendors Amid Market Disruptions**



By Lauren DeBellis Senior Editor

NEW YORK—Before the COVID-19 virus essentially put the country on pause, American consumer interest in products made here at home was booming. Spurred by the maker movement over the last decade, consumers became interested in where the goods they were purchasing were made, and also how and with what types of materials. It also cast a spotlight on the importance of celebrating the authenticity of skilled craftsmen.

Once the pandemic caused supply chain disruptions, especially in China, there has been an increase in opportunities for kitchenware manufacturers based in the U.S. to step in and bring

their U.S.-made products to the fore-

"Our retail customers had an immediate, urgent need for suppliers to adapt to the sudden change in supply and consumer demand," said Ellis Shamoon, CEO and founder of Coppell, TX-based Dexas. "The company was uniquely suited to respond quickly and safely, thanks to our position as both an importer and U.S.-based manufacturer. We're proud of our adaptable manufacturing capability and our seasoned employees. They are very adept at meeting our customers' needs, even

when there are supply chain disruptions, we have prepared for that."

Kitchenware vendors have noted an increase in sales during the pandemic, as American consumers increased their home cooking, baking and cocktailing.

Dexas, for example, said in the last few months, its assortment of anti-microbial poly and NSF-certified cutting boards have been popular with retail and food service customers.

With its factory based in Waco, TX, GelPro has also been able to keep production of its range of comfort anti-fatigue mats up and running in order to keep up with increased interest.

"Most retailers have shown an interest in our Made in the USA products over the years," said Kent Koen, vp/

continued on page 56



WellnessMats' new series of U.Smade mats features several decals supporting relief efforts.



# WellnessMats' **New Line** Supports Virus Relief Efforts

TROY, MI— With the new "All In This Together Program," WellnessMats and Smart Step Flooring, both manufacturers of anti-fatigue mats, are leveraging their Made in USA status to support COVID relief efforts.

The program consists of a new line of anti-fatigue mats that feature one of four permanent heat transfer decals: "Healthcare Heroes," "Frontline Heroes," "All In This Together," and "Standing Together." The companies are making the mats available at a reduced price and are donating \$19 of each purchase to the First Responders Children's Foundation, a charity that provides financial assistance, and essential PPE, to first responders and their families.

"Everyone I know has been affected continued on page 56





# Comfort, Wellness & Beauty

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Wahl said it was challenging to keep up with production during the coronavirus shutdown.

# Suppliers Weigh Domestic Production Advantages



By Donna Boyle Schwartz Contributing Editor

NEW YORK- Chants of "USA, USA" may seem more appropriate for sporting contests rather than shopping excursions, but the supply chain disruptions and negative consumer sentiment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, following on the heels of steep tariffs levied on many products manufactured in China, are causing many suppliers to consider boosting domestic production.

While many manufacturers of small

appliances in the home environment and personal care categories moved production to China and other overseas firms beginning in the 1990s, some leading companies maintained a robust U.S. manufacturing presence, and are now reaping the benefits of that strategy.

"We have always had the majority of products manufactured in the USA," pointed out Steve Yde, vp/Wahl International. "With the explosion of demand in made in the USA around the world, along with the barbering boom pre-COVID-19, it was hard just to keep up with demand. Now with COVID-19, the surge actually increased, even though barber shops closed down."

The demand has had a bit of a downside, however, especially when it involves product components. "Unfortunately many components do not have domestic sources," Yde noted. "We make most of our products in the USA, and many components of them we make in our factory, but raw materials like cords, wire, PC boards, etc., come from China, which makes it difficult to

transition everything."

Another problem was that demand spiked during a period when many manufacturers were forced to close due to the stay-at-home mandates. Wahl's domestic manufacturing was shut down for a month, Yde said, and on limited production for the subsequent 30 days.

"We are finally back in June at full employment, but with new safety protocols that do impact short-term productivity as we adjust to the new normal," he explained. "I hope consumers are willing to give us some grace as we are trying to meet demand."

Zadro Products manufactures about 40% of its product line in the U.S., including its newest Solana Ring Light Mirror, offering three color settings of 360-degree LED lighting, emulating the light that make-up artists use to achieve professional results.

"We believe domestic manufacturing will continue to be a path forward for our company and the personal care sector," said company director Liz Zadro. "It has been a large portion of our identity as a company, and a core competency our customers lean on us for. It is our hope and mission to continue to drive innovation and manufacturing on U.S. soil."

Zadro also saw sales increases in a somewhat less-traditional item, a fog-inhibiting spray for lenses.

"Consumer buying patterns have been shifting, so having the ability to increase output quickly definitely allowed us to take advantage of some trend spikes," she said. "For example, we sell a Fogless Spray that had a huge spike in sales due to masks fogging glasses and sunglasses. It's a domestically-made item, so we were able to accommodate a 300% increase in sales."

The company was able to avoid any major disruptions due to the pandemic, Zadro said, noting, "Domestic manufacturing helped us bridge that gap, though with the sudden shift of consumer buying patterns and PPE materials needed, there was a longer raw material lead time. Many of our factories

continued on page 54

# Tacony Rolls Out Simplicity Vacuum Assortment

FENTON, MO-Simplicity Vacuums is showcasing a full range of new floor care and cleaning solutions, including several new bagless, cordless and canister vacuum models.

"Simplicity vacuums are simple, practical, modern and perfect for busy moms or young apartment dwellers with pets," said Sherry Leitl, senior brand marketing analyst, home floor care for Tacony Corp., Simplicity's parent firm.

Featured models include the S20 Pet Bagless Upright, which contains a HEPA media filter and pet tool turbo brush; suggested retail price is \$199.99.

The S20 EZM Allergy Upright comes with accessory tools, a HEPA

continued on page 54



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# **Kitchen Electrics**

# Electrics Suppliers Position Supply Chain To Meet Demand



By Donna Boyle Schwartz Contributing Editor

NEW YORK— The tide of consumer sentiment regarding American-made products has ebbed and flowed, but a combination of the current pandemic and accompanying manufacturing shutdowns in Asia, coupled with the imposition of tariffs on a wide variety of Chinese-made goods, is causing many suppliers to take a second look at bringing production back to American shores.

While many suppliers of kitchen appliances moved production to China and other Asian countries in the 1990s, some major manufacturers chose to keep a tight rein on production by maintaining domestic facilities. These manufacturers are seeing an uptick in sales due to increased retailer requests, and consumer demand, for Made in the USA products.

"Currently, we have a heavy Made in the USA presence, as we're a Wisconsin-based manufacturing company," said Rick Carey, chief executive of The Metal Ware Corporation, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary. "We have extensive parts and products that are manufactured domestically. In regard to our housewares division, our Nesco Cake Pans are made in our Two Rivers, Wisconsin plant from locally sourced aluminum. We also manufacture all our dehydrator trays and accessories here in our injection-molding division as well."

He added, "We've seen an increase in requests for Made in the USA from retailers because domestic production lends itself to more supply chain sustainability- for example, known costing- and definite availability."

"We need to move on demand faster and work on a leaner business model," Carey said, explaining that the domestic supply chain "is faster than with overseas manufacturing, so we can run leaner on inventory, and we have more control over

**Metal Ware domestically** produces its Nesco brand food dehydrator trays.

production. One other major benefit we see with our Wisconsin plant, versus overseas production, is the ability to maintain quality because we can walk out onto the production floor."

However, on the down side, he noted, "Consistent trained labor in manufacturing is a limited resource domestically; the direct import business is financially easier to manage than domestic supplying."

Another benefit to the location of the company's Wisconsin plant was that there were relatively few disruptions caused by the pandemic.

"We've been fortunate enough not to have significant supply chain issues. The timing of COVID-19 fell during our slow season, and we bring in heavier amounts of inventory before Chinese New Year," Carey said. "We were in a

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# Capresso

continued from page 12

been able to supply product without a hitch," Shull said. "We have been fortunate in our ability to maintain our business. Espresso makers and grinders have been surging, because people who used to go to coffee shops now want to brew it at home using fresh beans."

Shull also credits Capresso's in-house customer service department as one of the brand's strengths, as well as the company's training programs for its retail customers. "Our retail partners do an amazing job of showcasing the product both online and at point of sale," he said.

Shull added, "The trends point to strong continued growth for the Capresso brand. The American consumer is becoming more and more sophisticated in their beverage tastes, and choice of beverage has become a mark of personality. Additionally, people want and expect top quality beverages at home, not just when they go out. Put this together with Capresso innovation and it adds up to exciting prospects for the next 25 years." HWB





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### SodaStream

continued from page 10 doing numbers now on a weekly basis that are equal to the numbers we were doing on a monthly basis a year ago."

Welsh pointed out that Amazon has raised the bar in terms of consumer expectations for home delivery. "Amazon has really set the stage in terms of expectations. People now want delivery within 48 hours in their homes," he said. "Also, existing customers are becoming more comfortable getting consumables online—CO2, flavorings, syrups—all can be delivered directly to the home."

"We also have been selling a lot of new machines, such as a 'starter kit' that comes with everything you need to start making at home beverages," Welsh noted.

The company's marketing focus has shifted somewhat under Welsh's stewardship. Originally, SodaStream was positioned as an inexpensive alternative to store-bought soda. Since its acquisition, SodaStream has ramped up its emphasis on sparkling water, including flavored seltzers, vitamin waters and the like.

"Sparkling water has just exploded, as part of the overall trend towards health and wellness," Welsh said. "As people are looking to reduce sugar in their diets, SodaStream allows them to create the beverage of their choice at home. Sparkling water is where Americans are right now in terms of consumption, and we think it is going to be huge in the future.

SodaStream management believes so strongly in the growth of the sparkling water segment that the company made it the theme for its February Super Bowl ad. The ad featured scientist Bill Nye and astronaut-in-training Alyssa Carson, and focused on the quest to

find water on Mars... with one hapless astronaut using the discovery to make sparkling water in seconds.

"The Super Bowl ad was huge for us," Welsh said. "It really made a statement. We think the emphasis on sparkling water is going to change everything."

One thing that has not changed is SodaStream's commitment to the environment, and its efforts to reduce purchases of single-use plastic bottles.

Welsh said the company is refining its marketing message to communicate two key attributes to the consumer: "The first motivating factor is consumption, and being able to make a beverage in the safety of your own home, and also to personalize that beverage so you get exactly what you want," he explained. "The second message is to reinforce the fact that by making beverages at home, you are not only doing good things for yourself and your family, but you are doing good things for the planet by reducing plastic waste."

Welsh also sees opportunity in the burgeoning market for mocktails and craft beverages. "The whole mocktail phenomenon has gotten a huge boost during the COVID-19 crisis, as people are experimenting with different types of beverages at home, and socializing online," he said.

On the horizon, SodaStream plans to continue to expand both domestically and internationally, leveraging the PepsiCo stable of brands, including classics like Pepsi, Sprite and Mountain Dew as well as newer flavors.

"The partnership with PepsiCo is really hard to beat, and has only strengthened SodaStream's capabilities in terms of supplying CO2, flavorings and an enhanced product assortment," Welsh added. "We have all of the puzzle pieces, and they all fit together." HWB

### U.S. Electrics

continued from page 46 healthy position to react to demand fluctuations."

Sharp also has benefitted from having domestic manufacturing facilities located in Memphis.

"We assemble and manufacture many of our products domestically," said Peter Weedfald, svp/sales and marketing of Sharp Electronics Marketing Company of America. "Our patented, Microwave Drawer Oven is built in Memphis. In the appliance and electronics industry, there will always be parts and components brought in from overseas, so we don't go so far as to say, Made in the USA very often, but we can certainly say 'Built in the USA."

Weedfald added that a combination of overseas and domestic production is a fact of life. "There will always be some circuit, switch or semiconductor that originates overseas, so Sharp may never experience a true 'either/or' situation when it comes to domestic versus overseas manufacturing."

Another company spotlighting made in America products is True Residential, which offers an assortment of under-counter refrigerators, wine refrigerators, freezer drawers, freestanding ice makers and under-counter beverage dispensers for both indoor and outdoor use.

"All True refrigerators are made in one of our four factories in Missouri," said Steve Proctor, director of sales and marketing for the company. "We are seeing more customers rally around American brands and we are proud to be part of that group."

"True has always been American made and we are proud to talk about the benefits of buying our brand," Proctor added. "We are increasing our communications around our American-made products and how important this is for





consumers to understand where their products come from."

Proctor noted that the company is vertically integrated, and therefore has not had any major disruptions due to the pandemic.

"Thankfully, True was deemed an essential business in Missouri, mainly because we manufacture commercial refrigerators for food, supermarkets, hospitals, etc.," he explained. "Supply chain disruptions are one reason why U.S. retailers are looking for American-made products and by having inventory, True has had a great opportunity to help fill retailer needs."

"Overall, we feel significant consumer confidence continues to support our American-made brand and are committed to supporting high quality manufacturing capabilities, as well as American jobs and economy," Proctor said. "Customers are shifting their buying habits to higher quality, American-made brands."

Still, many appliance suppliers said the cost advantages and labor market in China make it difficult to justify moving production to America.

"All our cookware, small appliances and accessories are currently made in China. The only products in our line that are Made in the USA are the America's Test Kitchen Pressure Cooker Perfection and Multicooker Perfection, customized for Zavor," said Sara de la Hera, the company's vp/sales and marketing. "Currently we are not making any plans to move production to a different location." HWB

ABOVE: True Residential's ice makers are made in the U.S.

LEFT: True Residential has maintained U.S. production for appliances such as wine refrigerators.

# **Furnish**

# **Home & Workspace**



# RTA Furniture Vendors Grow More Dynamic Operations



By MIKE DUFF Executive Editor

NEW YORK- Although Made in the USA has meant the development and reshoring of manufacturing in the U.S., ideas surrounding the concept have evolved to a point when it can be fairly said that the growth of domestic production, in the case of ready-to-assemble furniture, can be buttressed by a company's international operations.

Another critical factor thrown into the mix was the rise of e-commerce. RTA furniture producers have become adept at fulfillment and their capacity to drop ship stood them in good stead

during the COVID-19 outbreak.

The growth of RTA furniture manufacturers into multifaceted producers able to tap diverse sources was critical to the response to the pandemic. Of course, tariffs and related political issues already had encouraged those manufacturers to rethink their supply chains and what dependency they had on China.

The evolution of the segment in the U.S., even if it couldn't anticipate coronavirus, had been proceeding through a problematic period from one perspective, especially as regards tariffs, but the period of difficulty translated into opportunity for RTA manufacturers that already had addressed sourcing, inventory and fulfillment issues in ways that allowed them to accommodate surging demand from housebound consumers.

Yet, even though the general trends affect all the companies in the RTA sector, each of the major suppliers who are manufacturing here has taken a unique path that has led it to become increasingly sophisticated in terms of consumer behavior, marketing and merchandising.

In January, Novacap, a Canadian private equity firm, struck a deal with Bush Industries ownership that resulted in

the Jamestown, NY-based RTA producer's combination with Bestar, which has manufacturing operations in Quebec. Both companies had developed strong e-commerce operations that could drive even stronger growth by leveraging resources, capacities and expertise.

The combined Bestar-Bush company started 2020 strong by continuing to grow sales through e-commerce to an extent that the company's Jamestown plant, reopened after a temporary closure, began looking to add employees, Mark Weppner, svp/marketing, design and engineering noted. Although the Jamestown plant was closed for a few weeks, Bush distribution centers in Erie, PA, and Sacramento, CA, remained open to feed growing sales.

Companies that have grown comfortable with remote work during the COVID-19 crisis will, Bush expects, prompt further home office sales growth as many employees get a chance to work from home permanently.

"We're also anticipating many office redesigns in the near future to focus more on giving employees personal space," Weppner said.

"Our immediate need for additional staff will be in manufacturing, but we expect to add more office positions to continue to drive our e-commerce business," Weppner said. "This is an exciting time of growth for our company, and we're thrilled to continue our long history in Jamestown and to add to our team here."

Sauder Woodworking has taken a measured approach to how it is manufacturing overseas and at its Archbold, OH, facilities.

"We have been very intentional with regards to producing both domestically and in Asia," said Brent Gingerich, Sauder evp/sales and marketing. "We feel like one of our benefits is the ability to mitigate some risk by having both options. Initially, we simply made mixed material collections and chairs in Asia and everything else in Ohio. We have

 $continued\ on\ page\ 52$ 

### Walker Edison

continued from page 10 that is offering consumers more choice and fashion and so must be prepared to rapidly adjust to changes in demand.

The hiring of additional senior managers will bring new experience and viewpoints into the executive suite, but the initiative is consistent with Walker Edison's evolution. The company has a history of introducing and developing staffers to help it better perform specific tasks, Davis said, but also to also tap new ideas to address broader considerations.

"As we've expanded and added to the team," he said, "we have been able to specialize every department. The additions we have made to the leadership have really allowed us to focus and refine. As we look at the entire team, we can see that it has solidified the thought leadership across the company. Each team has great people that could have been siloed, but we know we can pull together to help the entire company."

McKenna was most recently the vp/ growth at Walmart, where she led marketplace business growth strategy, helped drive the company's e-commerce operations and spearheaded successful and forward-thinking initiatives. She brings over 20 years of e-commerce experience to Walker Edison during which time she has built global brands and businesses, spurred innovation and driven international growth. In addition to Walmart, she has held senior positions at Amazon and Johnson & Johnson as well as running her own e-commerce layette and juvenile furniture business, she pointed out.

McKenna told HomeWorld Business continued on page 52





- Decorative metal corner brackets and drawer pulls in burnished black
- Classic distressed walnut finish
- Beautiful floating top design and panel framed drawer fronts
- Easy assembly



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### Walker Edison

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that one of the reasons she was offered the role at Walker Edison was to help usher in the company's next decade and generation of growth. She added that the current circumstances, given the attention consumers have brought to their homes during movement restrictions prompted by the pandemic, have only made the opportunities available to the company more compelling. She said aiding the Walker Edison team in its pursuit of what chances the market offers is an attractive prospect and something she wants to help accomplish.

"We have amazing people," McKenna said. "But it's really about how do we now expand the teams from a human capital perspective but also from a technology perspective to not only maintain our current growth but to proactively anticipate the growth we're going to have over the next five to 10 years. Then it's at the same time expanding our growth channels. We have our core business we do currently, the B2B, white label market. There is more growth that we have there as we expand into private brands. Then there is our international growth, so obviously getting into the European market, and also diversifying where we make products. Many manufacturers have been heavy in China. Now, we are and have looked into expanding outside of China, so within Malaysia, South America and the U.S., analyzing where our opportunities are to make great products with a shortened time to market."

At the same time, McKenna said that the various consumer issues that are influencing shoppers are factors she has confronted in the past and that Walker Edison wants to translate into advantages.

"Sustainability is on top of my list," she said. "There are two sides to that coin, one is the sustainability and carbon footprint of our organization, which we're evaluating and taking drastic steps to improve. Then there is the sustainability of the products we make."

The company is asking itself how to develop sustainable products and looking at materials such as bamboo that have environmental advantages.

"You can grow a bamboo farm in five years, as opposed to using wood that takes hundreds of years to grow," she said, noting that the company also is reviewing how to make better products with longer lifespans all to the end of satisfying today's consumer.



"Joana brings the experience that will usher in a new era of growth and innovation at Walker Edison."

—Brad Bonham, Walker Edison

"More customers are looking for these sustainable products and making sure they themselves have a lower carbon footprint," McKenna said.

Walker Edison also will look at logistics and work to find ways acceptable to the consumer to get them products in a more environmentally friendly way. At the same time, she said, Walker Edison is looking at the entire supply chain to better position itself to satisfy demand that has been shifting as new dynamics, as well as technology, create new opportunities. The company not only is looking at changing its approach to sourcing in Asia but around the world including in the U.S.

"That's opened our ability to look throughout Asia, the Middle East, North America and South America to make different products, to do customizable products and to meet that demand to have a shorter time to market, which I think is just the evolution," McKenna said. "I think it's all opportunity for us, and it's about looking at which products make sense to make whether in North America or South America, and also where we can make the biggest impact from a human resource perspective, meaning where can we help support American jobs and American communities and make products that are meeting the demands of the market."

McKenna said she will support Walker Edison's efforts to make product development a comprehensive exercise as the company established new sourcing to meet goals as regards sustainabili-

ty and related social issues as well as the functional and aesthetic factors that propel advancing home fashion. Even as it explores new opportunities, McKenna said Walker Edison will keep refining its communication strategy to more effectively inform shoppers about the advantages the company's products offer but also to communicate its commitment to inclusivity including its work with African-American-, Latinoand women-owned business. Walker Edison furniture is for everyone, she said, and so the company wants to have a broad input from consumers and partners so it can continue to address customer preferences.

At the same time, Walker Edison is working with retailers to develop major private label programs and is looking at direct-to-consumer operations that will incorporate a product lineup that is separate and different from what the company creates for its retail partners. McKenna said Walker Edison can effectively operate multiple initiatives because of its emphasis on market intelligence, consumer insights and understanding of product trends.

"We are data driven," she said. "That's how we stay ahead of the curve and create the right products that the customers are demanding."

McKenna said that current market turmoil primarily arising from the pandemic may have shaken up the marketplace, but it also will reveal new opportunities as Walker Edison adapts and tests its capabilities.

With consumers and business facing circumstances that they could not have expected even a few months ago, she noted, "2020 is challenging but it's making us very aware people can be very productive working from home, or what I call working from anywhere. And for us specifically, it has highlighted what we do very well, meaning drop ship. Not only can we make furniture that is at the right price point and that is high quality and has a long lifespan, but we can get it to you faster. I think that's advantageous for us, and it also leads us to evaluate, with our partners, what are the products we need to make to meet this new demand and new work and life balance."

McKenna added, "There is so much opportunity at Walker Edison. I think Walker Edison is going to have an amazing 2020 and a decade of growth that is going to lead up best in class not only in the furniture we make but also the company we're building and expanding." HWB

### U.S. Furniture

continued from page 50

developed many more options so that now we can look at each opportunity and see where we get the best fit."

Because it was prepared for contingencies such as Lunar New Year, Sauder entered the coronavirus crisis as it emerged in China and the U.S. with the ability to respond.

"Fortunately, we always keep a large amount of inventory in our Ohio and California warehouses," Gingerich said. "Our import team also did a nice job of loading up prior to Chinese New Year so when COVID-19 hit we were in pretty good shape. We also have a long history with the office category and our portfolio reflects this. Our Ohio factory was closed for six weeks but the warehouses were able to continue shipping. Our e-commerce business has been very strong for the past several years, but it jumped to another level during this time. Many of the mass merchants stayed open and continued to sell furniture also during this time, although it was at a reduced level. Our Ohio factory has been back up for just over a month and is working hard to keep up with the strong demand and eventually replenish our warehouses."

The advantage of flexibility, both in manufacturing and how to reach consumers, whether through stores or digital platforms, with all the attendant support required to ensure the best outcomes in both channels, will play a significant role in how RTA furniture producers get the most out the opportunities arising through the pandemic.

"We continue to see strong demand on both the domestic and import product," Gingerich said. "E-commerce continues to be very strong but stores have bounced back the past several weeks also. I do believe that online retail has jumped ahead by several years and work at home is going to be a reality in the future. I think for those of us in the furniture industry, this is a huge opportunity and not really a threat." HWB



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### U.S. Production

continued from page 44
were shut down initially for the Chinese
New Year and then that date extended
anywhere from a few weeks to a few
months depending on the region. Domestically, we followed local and state
guidelines to reopen slowly and with
many more procedures for cleaning and
safety in place. We also focused quite
a bit on machine automation, so that
allowed us to continue to keep a limited
amount of personnel on site while continuing production output."

Zadro said the company is continually weighing the pros and cons of domestic versus international manufacturing. "We are hearing about initiatives from certain retailers to drive U.S.-made items, but there still is a delicate balance between imported and domestic costing when they are making their decisions. We are constantly looking at all options for various programs. We are continually assessing supply chain options, and the tariffs, which have a large financial impact to our product category," said Zadro.

Home environment supplier H2 Brands also is evaluating the best mix of domestic and international manufacturing, with about 15% of its products



Zadro is producing its Solana ring light mirror in the U.S.

currently originating in the U.S., according to Larry Kibler, svp/sourcing, H2 Brands. "H2B is a customer solutions company. We constantly look for the best innovation and value for our customers," Kibler said. "When we can provide this from the U.S., we do so."

"The market is very competitive for all of our customers, and they are constantly looking for solutions that provide the best total cost," Kibler added. "U.S. consumers today are getting the benefit of a highly efficient and specialized supply chain that delivers products every day at the best cost and benefit for the consumer. If solutions can be provided to customers from domestic sources that improve the customer's competitive situation, they are supportive of those moves."

Kibler points to a number of benefits to made in the USA products, including "reduced delivery costs, reduced lead times, overall reduction in inventory, environmental advantages and economic impact. Customers prefer a pull system for products," he said. "As consumers buy products, new products arrive and are placed into the shelves. Increases in sales can be easily matched by factories in real time, and slow moving inventory can be addressed by adjusting manufacturing schedules. There is no guessing involved in what the consumer wants to purchase, and retailers don't need to stockpile inventory weeks or months in advance of selling season. Overseas manufacturing can still produce products at low cost but supplier lead time and inventory is always a risk."

"We are constantly evaluating supply chain opportunities that will provide customer benefits," Kibler added.
"Manufacturing options are evolving outside of China, and we plan to work with any of our manufacturers that would like to explore production outside of China."

In spite of a renewed interest in U.S. manufacturing, many suppliers point to the cost and supply advantages of manufacturing in China and other Asian countries as the key factor in supply chain issues. Source Pro Direct, suppliers of Westinghouse branded air purifiers, maintains manufacturing in Asia, but has expanded its sourcing to include other countries.

"We are now manufacturing in Cambodia as well as China," said Source Pro's evp Andrew Bandremer, noting that tariffs are not an issue on air purifiers.

Manufacturing in Asia remains



"We are constantly evaluating supply chain opportunities that will provide customer benefits."

> —Larry Kibler, H2 Brands

the most cost-effective method, Bandremer said, pointing out that many components in appliances simply are not available from U.S. sources.

"Our entire infrastructure is in Asia," he said. "The ability to manufacture some of the components is not readily available in the USA. The costs are driven up in the U.S. due to all the regulatory practices that are enforced. We sell to mass accounts that are very price sensitive. Our products need massive investment in tooling, which is either too expensive or hard to find here."

Even the rising negative consumer sentiment towards China is not enough to overcome the cost advantage of manufacturing products there.

"We would manufacture here in the states, but our product retail would be too high," said Katie Sotor, vp/Crane. "Are U.S. consumers willing to pay more for their products just because it is made in the U.S.? I don't think so."

Still, some companies who are not currently manufacturing in the U.S. are rethinking their strategy in the wake of the tariff, supply chain and global pandemic issues.

"We do not have anything made here in the USA. I will say though that we are investigating this," said Sotor. "I would like to consider manufacturing some products in the USA."

# Simplicity Vacs

continued from page 44 media bag and filter, plus a durable metal brush roll and wand; suggested retail is \$299.99.

Other new floor care products include the S65 Cordless Multi-Use Vacuum, which offers users up to 25 minutes of runtime on a charge and includes carpet and hard floor power nozzles, multiple attachments and a stand with accessory storage; suggested retail is \$399.99.

The S60 Spiffy Broom Vacuum with a HEPA media filter is designed to clean bare floors quickly; suggested retail is \$149.99.

Simplicity's S10 CV Freedom Cordless Lightweight Vacuum weighs just 11 pounds and runs up to 50 minutes on a charge; the unit features self-sealing HEPA media bags to lock in allergens and has a suggested retail of \$699.99.

Simplicity also offers the Jill subcompact canister vacuum with tools, suggested retail \$189.99; the Sport portable canister with attachments, suggested retail, \$179.99; and the Flash micro handheld vacuum with attachments, suggested retail \$59.99.





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### U.S. Kitchenware

continued from page 42 sales and marketing, GelPro. "Now, with increased interest from consumers, we have seen an increase in requests for our Made in the USA products from both current and prospective retail partners."

This increase has propelled the company to launch its latest designs, including the Ergo Comfort Rug, an accent rug version of its core anti-fatigue mat.

In addition, Koen said with the renewed interest in products manufactured domestically, consumers seem to be willing to pay a premium for a product they know is supporting U.S.-based factories and workers.

"For us, it's about providing jobs in the U.S. and in our local communities, about maintaining a U.S.-based factory that can pivot production capacity to other products as needed, such as the face shields we manufactured during COVID-19, and about manufacturing the highest quality products, using the best materials, in our category," he added.

Newer vendors have also been able to embrace the skilled craftsmanship of U.S.-based factories to bring their products to market.

Such is the case with Airigan Solutions, a Southport-CT-based manufacturer of The Negg, a hard boiled egg peeler, invented by Bonnie Tyler and launched in 2016. She and business partner Sheila Torgan said they spent six months finding a U.S.-based factory to bring their vision to fruition.

"We built our idea on a 3D printer at the library and would try to turn that over to injection molding experts



and they would look at it and say those nubs inside couldn't be done. We spoke with so many and were discouraged," said Tyler.

That was until they had a chance meeting with a local toy inventor that had expertise with injection molding and was able to bring their idea to life.

"The labor process is just amazing," Tyler said. "From fabricating the mold to the laborer polishing the inside of the product, it is a sight to be seen."

"Made in USA status is a big differentiator," said Torgan. "There's a perceived difference in quality with American-made goods and for us, when you look at the benefits of managing inventory here and having a clear understanding of your own production and you can turn around new products in a matter of days or weeks versus months— those benefits outweigh the perceived the costs of manufacturing here in the U.S."

The pandemic has not quite halted the future plans of those looking to grow their U.S.-based manufacturing capabilities. In fact, for Jenna Sellers Miller, president and CEO of Delray Beach, FL-based Architec, manufacturer of cutting boards and kitchenware, she is planning to move forward with bringing more of the company's manufacturing here to the U.S.

The company has three U.S.-based factories where it manufactures its line of EcoSmart cutting boards made of environmentally friendly recycled materials, as well as other boards and accessories made of polypropylene, acacia and other materials. Based on the increased skillset and capabilities she has witnessed, here in the U.S., Miller said she plans to bring more manufacturing here.

"So many U.S. factories have expanded their capabilities and handle labor intensive items we never thought we could. So many factories here have streamlined their process so for example, their overmolding processes can now compete with China," she said.

This has led her to reshore several of the company's biggest product programs, in collaboration with some of Architec's retailer partners.

"This has also brought a lot of private label business to us. Our knowledge in making products in the U.S. has really become more appealing to customers. It feels good to bring product back to the U.S.," she said. HWB

ABOVE: The Negg egg peeler points to the quality of its U.S. manufacturing capabilities.

LEFT: Dexas said it was able to respond quickly to retailer needs with its U.S. production capability.



continued from page 42 by COVID," said Daniel Bouzide, owner and president, WellnessMats. "I have a nurse in my family that contracted the virus, and see how hard she is working to keep our community safe. I realized we must do something to help the frontliners making these huge sacrifices."

Bouzide also stated that the mats come at a time when the company has witnessed not only an increase in overall retail sales, but especially from its hospital customers. The company, he said, has been fortunate to continue production.

"Obviously COVID-19 has everybody upside down. Fortunately all of our products are Made in America and we do not use any offshore components for our formulations and manufacturing procedures," he said.

While daily production may slow due to implementations of current six foot social distancing requirements, the company said it has been meeting customer demand, especially as consumers seek healthy solutions for the home, such as comfort mats underfoot to support them while working at a standing office or meal prepping in the kitchen. HWB

WellnessMats' new decals are featured on its anti-fatigue mat line to support charity.









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