

carolina textiles

by BRENT CHILDERS, Editor

There's a fabled tale of the young damsel who managed to spin gold from straw.



Carolina Textiles is enjoying some success with its decorative wine bottle covers.

Well that may not be exactly how it goes. But then Carolina Textiles is no fairytale.

And while they haven't discovered the straw-to-gold twisting technique yet, you'll find them in the North Carolina wine enclave of Dobson twisting some very special yarn for some very unique socks.

What they have discovered is a niche. And although they may not be sweeping up bullion dust from the twisting room floor, their doors are still open and the company is experiencing modest growth.

Dale York, owner of the Surry County company, wants to emphasize the word modest.

But he knows from a growing list of customers that his operation indeed has found a niche in the company's ability to twist its own yarn and produce a unique lines of socks.

"A customer calls up and says he wants a specific combination in a sock," York says. "We know how to do it. We know what combination is going to work. It's not uncommon for us to put five ends together."

York says it's not just the ability to twist yarn that sets Carolina Textiles apart. It's the knowledge of "how" to twist the yarn.

Enter James Shelton (No kin to the neighboring wine makers).

You'll most likely find him sitting in his office thinking about how to produce yet another unique sock product from Carolina Textile's yarn twisting operation.

Shelton, with 40 years in the textile industry, cut his teeth on the machines that are humming away at the Carolina Textiles facility in downtown Dobson.

They are not state-of-the-art machines. Perhaps they were at some time – say 30 years ago. Manufactured by Scott and



Dale York, left, owner, and James Shelton, plant manager.

Williams, the 4.5-inch H&H true rib machines may be considered relics by some.

Not by York.

Technology can spur innovation. True, says York.

"But do you want to know where innovation begins?" he asks.

"Innovation begins in the mind."



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And while Carolina Textiles 54- to 72-needle knitting machines may not be high-tech, the knowledge that Shelton has in relation to how to knit a sock on those machines or how to twist yarn to go in those socks more than adequately compensates for the machine's older technology. An example is two products coming off the machines – one a four-foot legging being sold to an offshore market and the second a beautifully crafted infant's boot sock for another customer.

"Most people would not believe you could knit both of those on these machines," says Shelton.

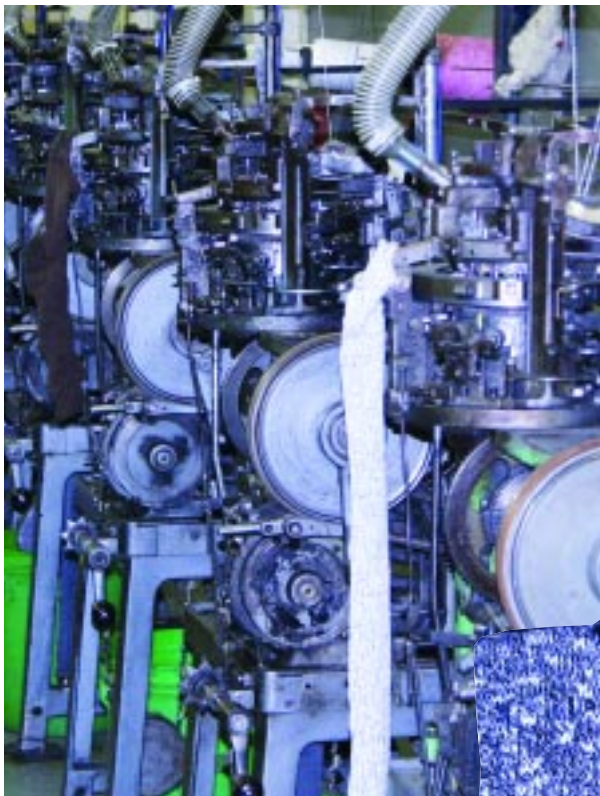
In fact, York and Shelton believe the older machines play a role in carving out their niche.

No one else can make the type sock products that Carolina Textiles is producing. That's because no one has any of the same machines. There are none in production – at least not that Shelton or York know.

Couple the unique capabilities that Carolina Textiles is able to extract from its machinery with the unique concepts that York and Shelton are able to extract from their many years of experience and you have a formula for a niche.

"Experience is our asset," York says.

Located in one of North Carolina's prominent wine producing areas, York sev-



The company's innovative use of its machinery assists in developing unique products.

eral years ago began toying around with the concept of making a wine bottle cover. Today, the company is producing the covers that feature personalized messages on the product. The item has been a

hit with wine producers and York currently is working on some more marketing ideas for the product.

Of course, Carolina Textiles' yarn twisting ability isn't the only factor in being a buoyant hosiery operation

in the often turbulent waters of global competition.

One other factor that York says plays a critical role in the operation's success is the ability to turn samples and orders around in record time.

How quick?

"We received a call at noon from a customer," he says. "We twisted it, knitted it, finished it and delivered it that evening."

Enter Kevin Pratt, who manages the finishing operation and shipping for Carolina Textiles.

A two-day turn-around on samples isn't anything extraor-



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path for manufacturing to be explored april 13

Harding Stowe, president and CEO of R.L. Stowe Mills Inc. in Belmont N.C., will be among the high-profile program participants at the North Carolina Manufacturing Summit Wednesday, April 13, at the Joseph Koury Convention Center in Greensboro.

As a spokesman for the state's textile industry, Stowe will join Bruce Kaylos, managing director of Wyeth Vaccines, Duronnie Harrell, owner of Assembly Systems in Charlotte, and Michael K. Dugan, professor of business at Lenoir-Rhyne College, on a panel that will focus on "Barriers and Opportunities for Manufacturing in North Carolina."

The event is sponsored by North Carolina Citizens for Business and Industry, the National Association of Manufacturers, and the Chambers of Commerce for Greensboro, High Point, and Winston-Salem.

Phil Kirk, president and CEO of NCCBI, said the conference will

include important perspectives on the future of manufacturing, including hosiery and textiles.

"Owners of businesses of all sizes will find the information helpful in the development of their business plans," Kirk asserted.

Topics also include "A Bias for Manufacturing and a Call for Action" by Ruth Shaw, CEO of Duke Power; "Can We Keep Our Manufacturing Edge in the New Economy?" by Michael Luger, director of the Center for Competitive Economies, UNC-Chapel Hill; and "Manufacturing in the 21st Century: Challenges and Opportunities" by Gov. John Engler, president of the National Association of Manufacturers which has endorsed open trade initiatives.

Registration is \$50 per person which includes lunch. Checks should be payable to "Chamber 3" and mailed to Greensboro Chamber of Commerce, PO Box 3246, Greensboro, NC 27402.

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dinary, says Pratt, because they do it often. In fact, York says the company has ran samples every day since the start of 2005.

"We do whatever it takes," says Pratt. "We've never missed a deadline on a shipment."

There's one other ingredient that York, Shelton and Pratt are quick to point out as another primary calling card for their products — quality.



A selection of styles from Carolina Textiles

"We have less than a hundredth of one percent on charge-backs," Pratt says.

The company has developed 250 styles for hosiery manufacturers who are marketing the Carolina Textiles products from Canada to Japan.

"No order is too small," says York.

In his 21 years in the hosiery business, York has seen the landscape shift.

"A lot of folks want it the way it used to be," he says. "But it's not. It would be nice to have a program that runs five weeks but that's not the animal anymore."

Another break with what many believe is a trendsetter lies in

the fact that Carolina Textiles doesn't sell to retail.

Their products are sold to other hosiery manufacturers who have the budgets for marketing. York says his operation is about as lean as they come. At this point in time, he is satisfied with the company's small but steady gains as they continue to build a list of customers who want a unique sock that is crafted with exceptional quality.

Carolina Textiles not only twists its own yarn but will twist yarn for customers as well. They also sell greige goods and will do contract finishing but does not do any dyeing. And of course, they provide the completed product as requested.

York places emphasis on special orders.

One reason York is content with his company's modest but solid growth is that he knows it would be mistake to take on more production than the operation can realistically meet.

He believes staying small and manageable allows the company to concentrate on the one other ingredient that the Carolina team believe is indicative of their success — customer service.

"The whole time we're here, we're thinking what can we do to serve our customers better," York says. "What do you need done? We'll do exactly what you want."

If you would like to share your comments on issues discussed in this edition, a related matter or perhaps a memorable item in your hosiery industry experience. We'll publish them in our next edition. Send them to:

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