



Hosiery Day at Legislature

Hosiery manufacturers, concerned they may lose funding for the Hosiery Technology Center, turned out recently at the state capital to lobby legislators to continue funding for the center headquartered in Hickory.

Their day-long efforts during which they spoke with legislators at a Hosiery Day Breakfast and then one-on-one in their offices, paid off. Legislators assured the executives that the \$475,000 appropriation for the center would be included in the Senate's proposed budget and approved when it goes for final approval by both chambers.



From left: Vance Richardson, president, Clayson Knitting; Ted Cooley, president, Wells Hosiery; Gary Moore, Kentucky Derby Hosiery; House Co-Speaker Richard Morgan; Darrell Frye, vice president, Harris & Covington Hosiery; Fran Davis, president, Twin City Knitting; Brenda Goings, Kentucky Derby Hosiery.

"The real question here is how to save the jobs of some 2,200 people working in hosiery in North Carolina," Nim Harris, CEO of Pickett Hosiery in Burlington, N.C., told legislators. "We are asking for your support for the invaluable Hosiery Technology Center."

The Hosiery Technology Center, which has offices in both Hickory and Asheboro, provides a multitude of services for the hosiery industry, including product testing, assistance in developing new business and training and certification for employees.

It was the driving force behind the development of testing standards for the industry as well as in making the federal government aware that products coming from outside the country often contain chemicals such as formaldehyde that are illegal in the United States.

The center offers a web site, Knitsource.com., which manufacturers can use to find new business.

"We have gotten information off the site which resulted in contracts for us, and as the result of those contracts, we have been able to hire eight new employees since May. Six of those were on unemployment," said one manufacturer.

Hosiery executives wanted to make two things clear to lawmakers: Hosiery is not a dying industry, although it has been hit hard

by foreign competition, and 2) The hosiery industry needs the services of the Hosiery Technology Center. To stay alive, the center needs state funding.

"It is absolutely essential that we have the Hosiery Technology Center to compete," said Darrell Frye of Harris & Covington Hosiery Mills in High Point. "We are looking for every way we can to be competitive and continue to provide jobs for people in North Carolina."

"Customers say they want American-made, but we know the prices they can get out of China and they are hammering us at all margins," continued Frye. "The Hosiery Technology Center helps us by testing products (from other countries) and showing what is in them and that we have in our products what we say we do."

Added Brenda Goings of Kentucky Derby Hosiery in Mt. Airy: "We are the biggest employer in Surry County, and we would like to join the industry in saying, 'We couldn't really live without the center, and we hope you will support them. The center has helped us particularly with quality and abrasion testing that we used to have to pay big bucks for. It also provides on-site training for our employees.'"

The \$475,000 appropriation, which hosiery lobbyists had been assured would be in the House's proposed budget had been put in the proposed budget and then dropped from it prior to it going to the Senate for approval. The reason it was deleted was because the appropriation was tied to the future of the Center

for Applied Technology in Belmont, according to Sen. David Hoyle who sponsored the bill for the Hosiery Technology Center appropriation. Some legislators had favored closing that center which would free up funds for the Community College system. Some of those funds were what legislators had planned to use for the Hosiery Technology Center appropriation. Therefore, when legislators decided at the last minute to keep funds for the Belmont Center in the budget because some legislators favored keeping it open, there was no funds for the HTC appropriation.



Nimrod Harris, center, president of Pickett Hosiery, and B.J. Frye, right, president of Conover Plastics Inc., were among 30 industry leaders at the Legislative Day event.

The nine-year-old Center with offices at Catawba Valley Community College and Randolph Community College has a budget in excess of \$900,000 a year. The center's testing lab and other services generate about \$300,000 annually and it receives an appropriation from the Department of Community Colleges of \$125,000.