

Is 1994 Ever To Return?

Moretz Inc. CEO John Moretz was quoted in a recent newspaper article as saying the difference between the hosiery industry of a few years ago and today is like night and day.

The files of May 1994 confirm this. Over 300 persons attended the CVHA (Carolina Hosiery Assn.) annual meeting in Hickory where executives from large and small companies rubbed elbows. Among the crowd were more than a dozen Moretz personnel and the special guest of the occasion – Moretz spokesman Kareem Al Jabbar.

John Moretz had just begun the signing of national celebrities to promote Moretz Sports. His vision would lead to a business that today generates \$144 million in annual sales with over 600 employees.

But in 1994, Moretz and other vertical mills were primarily domestic operations and supported dozens of knitting companies. CHA events were attracting hundreds for networking, including suppliers.

Denise Yow, then employed at Ellis Hosiery, was president of the association and pushed the outreach to state legislators and regulatory officials. She now is president of design and merchandising at Moretz. The late Hugh Simmons of Socks 'n Things Hosiery received the Member of the Year Award for his participation in legislative lobbying and his untiring support of the Hosiery Technology Center.

In the western Piedmont area of North Carolina, hosiery manufacturers joined the technology center in a special high schools "Careers Day" presentation. The booth featured HTC manager Dan St. Louis and volunteers from mills. The pitch: the hosiery industry has a bright future for creative and technically-skilled people.

(The 2005-007 HTC Strategies Plan calls for more outreach to high schools students).

Darrell and Sandy Houston were preparing to open a new hosiery company in Valdese. Houston Hosiery would join 110 other manufacturers in the CHA which merged into The Hosiery Association in 2000 and today is a chapter with no



programs directed at the local level.

Eleven years ago, programs and services topped the association's agenda for a planning retreat that would be held a month later at Jekyll Island, Georgia. Some 65 board members, officers, committee members, and suppliers would converge on the resort to outline another year of programs. As Moretz indicated, it was another era.

As April melted into May, the hosiery community headed to Charlotte for the IHE which was attracting scores of exhibitors from around the nation. Many of these exhibitors--Paramount-Crawford Machinery, Virkler Chemical, Speizman Industries--also are just names from the past.

Without question, globalism, 72-hour supply chain benchmarks, and the domi-

nance of big box chains have changed the environment. But hosiery companies continue to emerge, including three in the past year. The old adage, "what goes around also comes around", could bring additional changes yet.

History would suggest this. In 1994, Republicans rode a wave of victory, capturing both Houses of Congress and elevating Newt Gingrich to House Speaker. After a dramatic fall from grace, Gingrich now is looking at the presidency in 2008. The internet was gaining steam and the White House launched its first web page. And we're back in Iraq.

The lesson of history is that history repeats itself. Maybe.