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SGB WEEKLY

THE WEEKLY DIGITAL MAGAZINE FOR THE ACTIVE LIFESTYLE MARKET



8

UFC fighter Conor McGregor and Reebok design expert Corinna Werkle at launch of Reebok UFC Fight Kit Event. Photo courtesy Brad Barket and Getty Images.

MAKING NEWS

- 4 Movers & Shakers
Backcountry.com Sold to PE firm
- 5 Nike Co-Founder Phil Knight to Step Down as Chairman
- 6 Strider Teams with National Down Syndrome Society
- 7 New Balance Launches New Global Brand Platform
- 8 Reebok Unveils First UFC Fight Kit hosted by UFC stars in NYC
- 22 Industry News

PRODUCT FOCUS

- 10 Adidas Develops Ocean Waste Recycled Shoe in Partnership With Parley for the Oceans

- 11 Diamondback Youth Bikes Propel Future of Cycling
- 12 Klean Kanteen Launches New Products as Bring Your Own Campaign Enters Second Season
- 13 The Northwest Company Gains Exclusive with USC

MADE IN THE U.S.A.

- 14 How Kokatat Stays Local

FEATURE

- 18 Fly Fishing Gains New Followers

ON THE COVER: Yvon Chouinard with the Tenkara rod.
Photo courtesy Patagonia

MOVERS & SHAKERS

Amer Sports Winter and Outdoor (ASWO) appointed **Nick Castagnoli** as the new North American regional marketing manager for winter sports equipment at its Atomic and Salomon brands.

Brooks Running crowned **Manuel Castellanos** of Lakeview Charter High School in San Fernando, CA as its coach of the year.

Combat Flip Flops retained former Reebok Vice President of Advanced Concepts **Paul Litchfield** as an advisor.

Delta Apparel Inc. appointed **James Bradley Campbell** to its board of directors.

Lululemon Athletica Inc. named **Miguel Almeida** as EVP, Digital, effective as of the start of his employment with the company, which is expected to be mid-July. He had worked for Walgreens.

Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) selected **Amy Roberts**, who helped build the trade group's lobbying practice, as its Executive Director. Roberts' return to OIA follows a nearly 30-month stint at Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC), where she headed up sustainability initiatives.

Turtle Fur named **Patti Fisher** as its newest rep for the territory encompassing Southern California, Arizona and Las Vegas.

Misty Copeland, the star of Under Armour's "I Will What I Want" campaign launched last fall, has become the first African-American female principal dancer at the American Ballet Theater.

VF Corp. promoted **Steve Rendle** to President, COO and to VF's board of directors. Rendle had most recently been SVP Americas and was VP and Group President - Outdoor & Action Sports from 2011 to 2014.



BACKCOUNTRY.COM SOLD TO PE FIRM

Backcountry.com has been sold by Liberty Interactive Corporation to TSG Consumer Partners LLC for an undisclosed sum. TSG said it would help the online retailer of outdoor gear and apparel expand into adjacent categories and international markets, as well as enhance marketing and brand building efforts.

While Backcountry Founder Jim Holland retains a stake in the specialty e-tailer, the companies did not disclose any financial details of the transaction. Backcountry.com includes flagship Backcountry brand, as well as Competitive Cyclist, MotoSport, Bergfreunde, Steep&Cheap and Whiskey Militia.

"As the outdoor market continues to expand, TSG is looking forward to working with the Backcountry team to harness the company's untapped potential to grow and expand its reach to more outdoor enthusiasts worldwide," said Jennifer Baxter Moser, managing director at TSG.

Backcountry President and CEO Jill Layfield thanked Liberty, which acquired a controlling stake in the company in 2007, for helping the company grow and expand. TSG's past and present investments include Vitaminwater, Smart Balance, Popchips, Muscle Milk, Yard House, Revolve Clothing, Smashbox Cosmetics, Pureology, E.L.F. Cosmetics and Paige Denim.

"We look forward to this next chapter with TSG, a proven brand-builder with over 25 years of experience in the consumer industry," said Layfield. "We believe TSG represents the ideal partner for Backcountry, and we will work with them to continue to improve our offerings and merchandising, optimize our technology platform and enhance our distribution efforts. By combining TSG's expertise with Backcountry's leadership position in the outdoor market, the company will be well-positioned to build on our current platform and drive significant growth."

Prior to the transaction, Backcountry was attributed to the Liberty Ventures tracking stock group of Liberty.

"Backcountry has performed nicely over the past eight years, and its Goat logo has come to symbolize authenticity and excellence in the outdoor industry. We wish Jill Layfield and the team continued success and will remain loyal customers," said Greg Maffei, Liberty president and CEO.

NIKE CO-FOUNDER PHIL KNIGHT TO STEP DOWN AS CHAIRMAN

Nike Chairman and Co-founder Phil Knight announced plans to step down as company Chairman. Knight indicated he wanted Nike President and CEO Mark Parker, who has held those positions since 2006, to succeed him. Nike's board currently expects to name a new chairman sometime in 2016.

Knight, 77, started the company with former Oregon track and field coach Bob Bowerman in 1964 with both agreeing to put \$500 down on what was seemingly a small project. Just over a half-century later, Nike boasts an annual revenue stream of over \$30 billion.

Chairman since 2004, Knight said, "I have long felt a great responsibility to provide clarity and certainty for the long-term governance and leadership of Nike and for my ultimate transition as chairman. I have worked closely with the Nike Board in developing this plan and in identifying the most qualified person to serve as my successor in this role. I believe Mark is the best choice to succeed me. He has been an outstanding CEO for the past nine years, and has demonstrated time and again his love for this company and his clear vision for capturing the tremendous potential Nike has to innovate, inspire, and drive growth. For myself, I intend to continue to work with Nike and look forward to contributing to its future well after my chairmanship ends."

"Phil founded Nike to serve athletes," said Parker. "That vision and inspiration continues to drive our success today and around the world. I have been privileged to work with Phil for over 35 years, and Nike's exceptional management team and I are committed to building on Phil's vision to drive the next era of growth for Nike."



Phil Knight, Chairman and Co-founder, Nike

Knight owned a 16.26 percent stake in Nike as of December 31. He will transfer most of those shares, representing about 15 percent of Nike's common stock, to Swoosh LLC. The directors of Swoosh will be Knight himself, Parker, and Nike directors Alan Graf and John Donahoe. Knight has already transferred 128.5 million shares, or about 15 percent of Nike's total outstanding shares, to Swoosh. Because Knight owns a large amount of Nike's Class A shares, which aren't publicly traded, Swoosh now has the power to elect three-quarters of Nike's board. Knight said the move would help keep Nike's corporate governance strong.

Nike also named Knight's son Travis to a spot on the board. Travis Knight, 41, is the CEO of animation studio Laika LLC and was producer and lead animator on the movies "ParaNorman" and "The Boxtrolls."



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Special Olympics Unified Relay. Photo courtesy Strider Bikes

STRIDER TEAMS WITH NATIONAL DOWN SYNDROME SOCIETY

Strider Bikes of Rapid City, SD, known for their innovative pedal-less children's bikes that get kids riding at the earliest age possible, is taking this user-friendly bike design and applying it to an even greater good.

In May, Strider participated in the Rapid City, SD, Special Olympics Unified Relay Across America, and through October 2015, Strider will partner with the National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS) to sponsor the 2015 Buddy Walk Events, donating approximately 60 bicycles to the Buddy Walk organization.

According to the company, Strider is the only bike manufacturer who has partnered with Special Olympics or the NDSS. Established in 1995 to celebrate Down Syndrome Awareness Month in October, the walk has flourished from 17 to more than 250 events across the U.S.

The Strider Rider Fund, established in 2014, has since donated more than \$300,000 in bicycles and riding accessories to non-profits ranging from hospitals, schools, city parks, special events and BMX tracks. The company plans to see this donation increase drastically this year, with the majority going to special needs events and organizations.

Strider's unique two-wheel stability model is a leap from traditional training bicycles that normally include training wheels and pedals. The strider design has neither, allowing young learners, special needs children and adults or newbies to the sport to keep their feet on the ground as they learn to stabilize. Taking away training wheels and pedals promotes proper leaning and steering. Hesitant newbies can keep their feet on the ground and progress at a pace they are comfortable with, thereby creating a more enjoyable experience and increasing the odds of continued practice.

According to one Strider mom's testimonial, "My 5-year-old was born with developmental dyspraxia and struggles with balance and coordination. It is

motivating for him to have this big boy bike compared to a three-wheeled bike because it resembles a big bike like his mother (myself) has."

Other special needs bike models on the market today have designs focused on comfortable riding. Either equipped with a low-seat, double-seat (to ride with an adult) or three-to-four-wheeled designs, these models often do not recreate the true biking experience. Strider models also promote other non-cognitive learning skills.

Special Olympics Coach and Education Teacher, Amy Heuston said, "We use them for recreation, social skills, community skills, physical therapy, adaptive PE, language development and behavior interventions."

Current Strider models are made for both children and special needs riders of all ages. The Genuine Strider 16 (ages 6 and older, all abilities) and Genuine Strider 20 (ages 13 and older, all abilities) come in an assortment of bold colors.

Find the date and location of the walk nearest you on the NDSS website and join the cruise: ndss.org/Buddy-Walk/Find-a-Buddy-Walk/2015-Buddy-Walks



Genuine Strider 16



Genuine Strider 20



NEW BALANCE LAUNCHES NEW GLOBAL BRAND PLATFORM

New Balance debuted a new brand platform - Always in Beta - the brand's promise "to relentlessly improve, to never stop pushing and to always strive for more." At the same time, the brand highlights its focus on inspiring athletes around the world, both professionally and every day, to reach for and achieve their goals, and then reset them towards even greater athletic accomplishments.

Bloomberg News reported that the new platform would support the brand's first global advertising campaign, which includes the first television commercials in about four years and would reach 70 countries. The campaign is expected to be twice as big as any in its 109-year history and features 17 athletes in various sports around the world.

"Always in Beta is true to New Balance's 100+-year old brand, our performance-based heritage and our core values," said Rob DeMartini, president and CEO at New Balance, in a statement. "It highlights our commitment to not rest on past successes, but be dedicated in our focus to continually push forward, to improve and aggressively deliver our best."

The cornerstone of the "Always in Beta" campaign is "The Storm" brand television commercial that represents the unrelenting desire to keep moving forward, to evolve and to progress. Filmed across three continents over four weeks, it follows the story of a woman on a run that reaches her limit. Unable to keep going, she digs deep, and with the help of a few hundred athletes - both professional and amateur - she finds the motivation to push forward.

"The Storm" video features 17 of the brand's sponsored global professional athletes across the sports of running, baseball, tennis, football/soccer and triathlon. Faces of the campaign include Jenny Simpson, Emma Coburn, Miguel Cabrera, Robinson Cano, Milos Raonic, Aaron Ramsey, Vincent Kompany and Sebastian Kienle, among others. An online "Beta Hub" experience at newbalance.com/beta invites consumers to immerse themselves in all things Beta with stories featuring the brand's athletes and product innovations. In addition, the campaign also includes in-store, digital, and print advertising.

"At New Balance, we know the meaning of always pushing forward because we are always working to innovate our products and initiatives that serve and inspire our global athletes," said Hilary Keates, director, global marketing and brand management. "This is the mindset we share with our athletes and that is reflected in our Always in Beta platform."

The campaign highlights key global product introductions - Vazee running footwear and the Made for Movement apparel collection. It is also timed around the launch of the brand's inaugural football/soccer footwear line and its 4040v3 baseball shoe.

Since 2010, the brand has nearly doubled its sales globally to \$3.3 billion, sponsored high-caliber athletes around the world, and entered the global football (soccer) market.

The television campaign breaks in the U.S. on July 6 exclusively on ESPN and will add high profile cable and network programming targeting 18 to 34 year olds for the September through October timeframe. The digital component includes ESPN, YouTube, Fox Sports, Sports Illustrated, Dead Spin and Pop Sugar. The print campaign starts in the August issues of *Runner's World*, *Running Times*, *Women's Running*, *Competitor*, and *Outside* magazines. Arnold Worldwide of Boston developed the campaign.

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Reebok Unveils First UFC Fight Kit

Elevated by a host of UFC stars including Ronda Rousey and Conor McGregor, Reebok unveiled its first UFC Fight Kit last week in New York City.

By Thomas J. Ryan

Launch Of The Reebok UFC Fight Kit. Photo courtesy Brad Barket and Getty Images

Last December, Reebok announced a groundbreaking partnership with UFC, the world's leading mixed martial arts organization, to become the exclusive authentic global outfitter of UFC, creating for the first time UFC 'Fight Week gear' and a 'Fight Night kit' for all UFC athletes. The six-year deal was reportedly valued at \$70 million.

The kit, to be unveiled publicly with the blockbuster pay-per-view event headlined by Chad Mendes vs. Conor McGregor on July 11, comes in three variations. The Champion kit will feature grey and black colors with gold trim, while the Country kit will feature nation-specific colors. The Universal kit will be black and silver and available to all UFC athletes. The UFC Fight Kit includes the official UFC walkout jersey, variations of the Octagon short, the Octagon skort, the walkout hoodie, and assorted performance tops for women.

At the event, Matt O'Toole, Reebok's president, heralded the launch as a "landmark moment" for the UFC, MMA fans, UFC fighters and Reebok. "UFC athletes represent some of the toughest and most dedicated humans in the world and Reebok is proud to develop the first-ever dedicated kit to support and enable their greatness in the Octagon," said O'Toole.

He added that the kits represent "a brand new look that will usher in a new era for UFC."

Developed with numerous insights from UFC fighters and Reebok's experience making uniforms

for football and basketball, the collection features innovations that support strength, speed and flexibility, while allowing each athlete to prominently display their names and national pride.

"It's about function but also achieving the right look that reflects the passion of the sport," said Corinna Werkle, general manager, training business unit, Reebok, at the event.

In addition to Rousey and McGregor, the event drew 23 other UFC fighters, including Robbie Lawler, welterweight champion; Chris Weidman, middleweight champion; and Cain Velasquez, former heavyweight champion and current contender.

UFC President Dana White said he's heard "nothing but positives" about the fit and feel of the kits from his league's fighters. "This gear was built and designed specifically for MMA athletes," said White. "Not only does it elevate the look of the sport - it revolutionizes the way they train, compete and perform."

She said the four pillars defining the kits are:

- » **Flexibility:** 360-degree multi-directional stretch fabric and laser cut side vents offer functional mobility. Anti-slipping technology ensures form fitting for every fighter position. Lightweight low-profile construction promotes weight reduction and streamlining. Werkle said, "It feels like a second skin."
- » **Strength:** Sublimated graphic execution and reinforced double welded seam sealing construction adds durability and reduced abrasion. Advanced seamless technology with no threads involved eliminates irritation.
- » **Customization:** Features include country specific badging and athlete's name with iconic on-garment placement.



Matt O'Toole, President, Reebok



Ronda Rousey in attendance at the launch of The Reebok UFC Fight Kit. Photo courtesy Brad Barket and Getty Images

» **Comfort/Fit:** PlayDry moisture management technology quickens drying time by rapidly moving moisture away from the body, allowing fighters to maintain optimum body temperature. Special attention was paid to cut and support. For instance, the collection will introduce the first sports bra designed for UFC fighters. Ronda Rousey told media attendees that she has in the past had to change her fighting technique to avoid “flashing people” and has also worn two bras at one time in a fight for extra support.

Reebok also launched its Reebok Combat collection for those “who want to train like fighters,” said Todd Krinsky, VP at Reebok. Krinsky said “nothing is growing faster” than the sport of combat training, represented by CrossFit and other “tough fitness” activities. He noted that half of those who participate in combat training are women, 40 percent started over the last 12 months and many are UFC fans.

“MMA is an exciting sport that is on the forefront of fitness and conditioning and Reebok Combat offers a full collection of training apparel to support those who like to train like a fighter,” said Krinsky. “Reebok Combat is part of our holistic commitment to growth and support of MMA at all levels and we are excited to see the reaction to this brand new category from all corners of the world.”

In an interview with SGB, O’Toole said the Reebok Combat would start selling on Reebok.com, ufcstores.com, Reebok stores as well as in 50 in-store shops at The Sports Authority with bigger UFC fan-bases.

O’Toole said many UFC fans had been challenged to celebrate their fandom without an official UFC uniform. He noted that fans of Canadian welterweight champion Georges St-Pierre have been seen wearing Montreal Canadian jerseys at matches to show their support. But he said the Reebok Combat collection also taps an underserved opportunity to reach those embracing combat training.

“The UFC is very popular with our consumer who is a little bit younger, post-university person who likes to work out a lot and partake in obstacle races like the Spartan Race we endorse. It’s a lot of active people into these very intense activities. And we feel they need to be spoken to but they can’t find some of things they need at retail today.”

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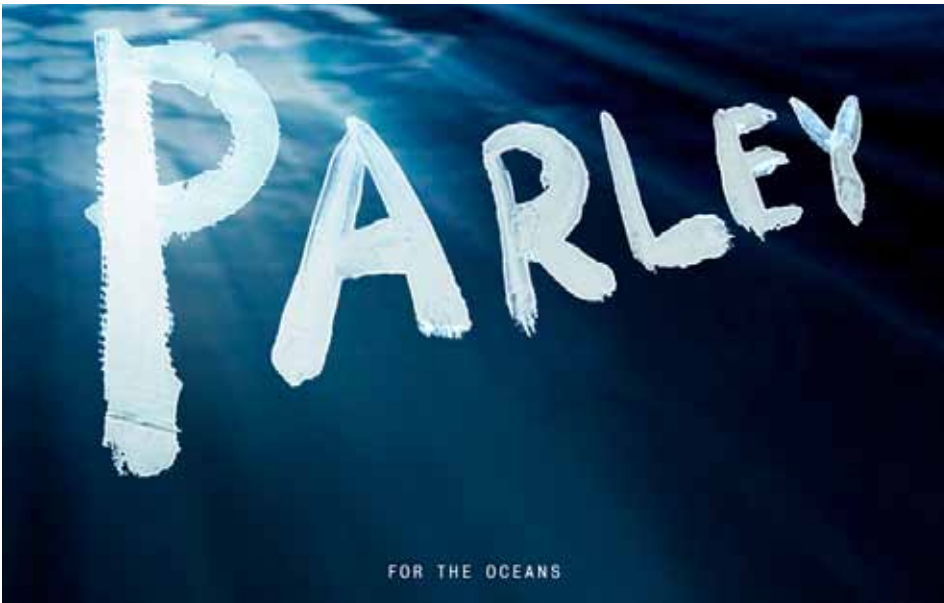


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ADIDAS DEVELOPS OCEAN WASTE RECYCLED SHOE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARLEY FOR THE OCEANS



Made from ocean waste, Adidas and Parley for the Oceans Footwear Concept

At a meeting last week at the United Nations headquarters, Adidas unveiled its new partnership with Parley for the Oceans, an organization dedicated to raising awareness about the disastrous state of the world's oceans and supporting projects that can protect and conserve them.

As part of the partnership, Adidas created a shoe upper made entirely of yarns and filaments reclaimed and recycled from ocean waste and illegal deep-sea gillnets. Parley partner Sea Shepherd retrieved these nets after a 110-day expedition tracking an illegal poaching vessel, which culminated off the coast of West Africa.

The concept Adidas shoe illustrates the joint commitment of Adidas and Parley for the Oceans and offers a first look at the kind of consumer-ready ocean-plastic products that will be featured later this year. As a founding member, Adidas supports Parley for the Oceans in its education and communication efforts and its Ocean Plastic Program that aims to end plastic pollution in our oceans.

"We want to establish the oceans as a fundamental part of the debate around climate change," said Cyrill Gutsch, founder of Parley for the Oceans. "Our objective is to boost public awareness and inspire new collaborations that can



Cyrill Gutsch, Founder, Parley for the Oceans



Surfer facing ocean plastic pollution

contribute to protect and preserve the oceans. We are extremely proud that Adidas is joining us in this mission and is putting its creative force behind this partnership to show that it is possible to turn ocean plastic into something cool."

Adidas' Eric Liedtke, who is also a member of the Parley for the Oceans Steering Committee, said "We are incredibly excited to join Parley for the Oceans as they bring the cause of the oceans to the attention of the United Nations. Adidas has long been a leader in sustainability, but this partnership allows us to tap into new areas and create innovative materials and products for our athletes. We invite everyone to join us on this journey to clean up the oceans."



Photo courtesy
Diamondback

DIAMONDBACK YOUTH BIKES PROPEL FUTURE CYCLING

In 2013, biking was the most popular outdoor activity among youth in America. It was also the outdoor activity done with the second-highest frequency. These 2013 records computed by the Outdoor Foundation in the Outdoor Recreation Participation Report may not have been strong enough to prompt bicycle brands to expand their 2014 models to encompass youth-specific options. Despite 2013 growth, 2014 trends from the National Bicycle Dealers Association suggest a decline in youth participation in the sport.

Whether or not these numbers swayed this Summer's newest products, the Kent, WA-based Diamondback Bikes continues to strive toward youth inclusion, creating three new Summer 2015 bikes to meet the needs of young riders that are either entering the sport or building up from basic riding fundamentals.

The Podium 24, Podium 650c and Podium 700c are Diamondback's way of enlarging their product line while positioning the young rider as a serious consumer. You won't find any plastic driveway toy bikes in Diamondback's repertoire. Their youth-specific models are purposely built for kids who are serious about cycling.

The Podium 24 is a 24" wheeled road bike and is a mini-me modeled directly off Diamondback's adult models, equipped with an 8-speed drivetrain and standard road drop bars. The Podium 650c, Diamondback's other youth mountain bike, includes features from Men's and Women's

models. V-brakes allow for added tire clearance if interest changes from straight mountain trails to cyclocross rides. Last of all, but with nonetheless professionalism in its design, Diamondback created the Podium 700c for junior road bikers. The 700c was made with the same wheel size as adult bikes and prompts earlier entry into the sport of road riding and racing. Diamondback positions the 700c as a stepping-stone into more serious cycling.

Creating market options for young riders can only serve to assist in the growth of the bicycle and overall active industry nationwide.

Diamondback Bikes has changed ownership and brand names many times since its premiere to market in 1977, when it first focused on BMX style bicycles. The brand was originally owned by Western States Import, and then acquired by Derby Cycle Company owners of Raleigh Bicycle Company in the 90's. Diamond and Raleigh merged and today the brand operates as Diamondback, under ownership of Raleigh Bicycle Company.

The Diamondback brand stretches to include not only products but also informative content for cyclists of all ages. Everything from health, fitness, skills, bike maintenance, riding communities, teams and "Cycling 101" can be found on their official website...including sophisticated and intelligent resources for youth riders.

Just because they're young, doesn't mean that they won't be the next Eddy Merckx.



Podium 24



Podium 650c



Podium 700c



Photo courtesy Klean Kanteen

KLEAN KANTEEN LAUNCHES NEW PRODUCTS AS BRING YOUR OWN CAMPAIGN ENTERS SECOND SEASON

Northern California-based maker of stainless steel, BPA-free reusable water bottles and food containers Klean Kanteen, founded in 2004, launched a new website and #BringYourOwn campaign project last fall to provoke discussion among consumers regarding their daily use of disposable products, and the brand is reigniting the conversation this summer with the launch of even more innovative products to help consumers “bring their own.”

The company’s initial rise to market popularity in 2008 was brought about by a similar call to action - as public awareness about harmful BPAs led consumers to liner-free options in water bottles. Klean Kanteen projected 2008 revenues of \$18 million, up from \$2.5 million in 2007 and less than \$1 million in 2006.

As part of the 1,200-member B-Corp movement, Klean Kanteen approaches business with the dual motivation of benefiting society with shareholders. B-Corp is to business what Fair Trade certification is to coffee or USDA Organic certification is to milk, according to this highly influential group that includes a growing number of important outdoor brands.

Klean Kanteen gained B-Corp certification in 2012, and since then has raised its impact assessment score 20 percent, to 99 points out of a total of 200 in 2015. B-Corps are certified by the nonprofit B-Lab and tested to meet strict standards of social and environmental performance, accountability and transparency, according to its website. Other B-Corp companies include Patagonia, Ben and Jerry’s, Etsy, Seventh Generation, United By Blue, Kammok, Senda Athletics, Bhakti Chai and others.

“As a B-Corp, we want to inspire conversation around a different way, around what’s possible: simple, healthy solutions that truly benefit our communities and families,” said Erika Bruhn, director of marketing and

brand at Klean Kanteen. “It really matters to us to leave that legacy.”

Klean Kanteen’s remodeled 2015 website will feature a new blog of information-driven content relating to the “reusable lifestyle,” while the #BringYourOwn social media push will consist of a short-film series capturing everyday people confronted with single-use decisions. Although the thought process for consumers may be that using disposable products “just this once” won’t make a difference, consider that Americans use more than 58 billion paper cups annually, according to Klean Kanteen. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) records 33 million tons of plastic waste was generated in 2013 alone with only nine percent recycled. The #BringYourOwn film series brings to light social issues contributing to the single-use culture.

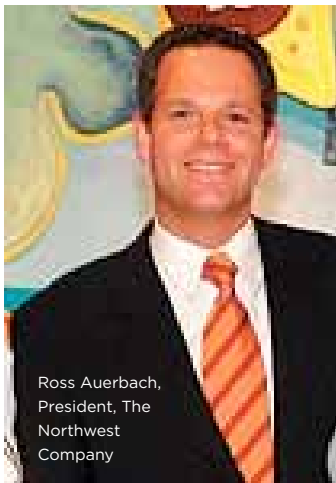
Klean Kanteen products to support these efforts include the new Vacuum Insulated 16oz Tumbler, \$24, a double-walled bottle for hot or cold drinks, electro-polished so metals won’t leach into liquid and perfect for everyday use. Also new is the Vacuum Insulated 20oz Classic, \$30, that won’t retain or impart flavors, featuring Klean’s Classic Loop Cap for portability, and assured to keep beverages hot for 12 hours and cold for 24, with a 1.75” opening for easy filling and pouring; and a Vacuum Insulated 32oz Growler, \$55, insulated in stainless steel, featuring the removable Swing Lok Cap that can be replaced with any other Klean cap, and created for grab-and-go micro brew.

In addition to the #BringYourOwn awareness efforts, as of 2015, Klean Kanteen has donated more than \$1 million to 1% for the Planet – the collection of companies donating one percent or more of annual net revenues to environmental organizations. Klean Kanteen also sponsors awareness initiatives with 5 Gyres and the Breast Cancer Fund. ■



THE NORTHWEST COMPANY GAINS EXCLUSIVE WITH UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

The Northwest Company, a leader in the home textile industry and the number-one throw manufacturer in the U.S., formed a multi-year agreement with the University of Southern California, which gives Northwest exclusive rights to manufacture and distribute blankets, throws, bedding, towels and bathroom accessories in off-campus retail channels.



Ross Auerbach,
President, The
Northwest
Company

The Northwest Company, known most widely for its sports blankets, will offer a variety of University of Southern California accessories beginning in July 2015. The products will be sold in leading and independent retailers nationwide as well as on thenorthwest.com.

“The University of Southern California’s rich history and traditions have helped contribute to the passion that the USC brand embodies,” stated Ross Auerbach, president of The Northwest Company. “These values and characteristics are what endeared the USC brand to us, and we’re the driving force behind our desire to expand this commitment. The Northwest Company is proud and honored to be a part of USC’s traditions and passion, and we look forward to achieving continued success together for years to come.”

“Northwest has extensive experience with exclusive agreements with the professional leagues and we are confident in their abilities to both protect and enhance USC’s brand in these product categories,” said Steve Fuller, trademarks and licensing manager at the University of Southern California. ■



Photo courtesy Kokatat

The Future of Made in the U.S.A

How Kokatat Stays Local

By Jahla Seppanen

Despite the increase in global sourcing for materials, manufacturing and labor, there remains a small, passionate few who stick to their roots by making products right here in the U.S.A.



Steve O'Meara, Founder & President, Kokatat

Paddle sports apparel legend Kokatat, based in Arcata, CA, is usually one of the first that comes to mind to recounting these stories. With a focus on local design, testing and production, Kokatat is literally able to stay close to the product. And while different companies require different levels of product and sourcing involvement, Kokatat Founder and President Steve O'Meara knew from inception that keeping operations local was vital.

That was over 44 years ago. Today Kokatat accounts for more than 90 percent of annual revenue from sales of products made in its CA-based

factory and its local and regional manufacturing partners. Jeff Turner, Kokatat sales manager said, "The only way to make the quality we require is to do it ourselves."

"We are very efficient," said O'Meara about the details of Kokatat's unique model. "If you are going to be a U.S. manufacturer, you have to be efficient. It's really hard to do commodity type products in the U.S., with a low material and high labor component. These are not products as important to Kokatat."

The Product

It's the classic story of the American dream, how this grassroots company was able to grow from humble beginnings to become one of the greatest names in watersports.

O'Meara started his business in what was the traditional outdoor space, selling backpacking and cycling equipment at his small store before converting his focus to watersports, which is a much smaller niche market. The shift was slow but deliberate, as O'Meara and his gang took part in developing each product. "We are designed and built by paddlers and for paddlers," continued Turner.

Kokatat photographs dating to the 1970s and '80s track the evolution of products and field-testing, when the company operated under the name Blue Puma.



Kokatat Predator

The overall success of Blue Puma apparel and gear did not go unnoticed. Smelling competition, the shoe, clothing and sportswear giant Puma quickly jumped to secure the name for itself, sending a cease and desist to Blue Puma for rights to the name. O'Meara says in a video that Puma's threat to a lawsuit was the best thing to happen to Kokatat - prompting the decision to be a "big fish in a small pond," and divert focus to watersports and away from the larger outdoor industry.

Kokatat now creates a robust line of technical paddling apparel and accessories including Dry Suits (newest Kokatat Idol), Paddling Suits, Dry Tops, Jackets, Bibs & Pants, Insulation, Destination Sunwear, PFDs (newest Poseidon and upcoming for Spring 2016 Predator), T-shirts, Hats, Gloves & Mitts, Footwear and Custom Dry Suits.

During its time under the name Blue Puma, Kokatat partnered with the now famous GoreTex. "We looked at how to seam seal the GoreTex in a way that made dry suits really waterproof," said O'Meara. The status quo at the time was to use a urethane dry suit, but Kokatat changed that.

Adapting to the new material meant evolving test methods. With the switch to GoreTex fiber came added difficulty in pinpointing a leak. "We had to create a whole new testing protocol," said Turner, "But now that's a hallmark. Every single individual dry suit is fully pressure tested to ensure it will not leak. Our confidence in that is so high that we provide a lifetime warranty on every product."

Kokatat's in-factory service department fixes tears or defects in products at low cost and quick turnaround. "We see a lot of suits that are 10 to 20 years old," said Turner. Testing and repair occurs on the ground floor, by-hand. Turner said that Kokatat recently became a recognized Quality Management System (QMS) and gained ISO certification. The company also tests its gear via sponsored expeditions and athletes in some of the world's harshest climates and situations.



Always evolving, Kokatat recently reinvented the dry suit by working with a supplier to design a full dry suit that separates at the waist as opposed to the back or shoulders. The suit won Gear Junkie's Best of Show at Outdoor Retailer last year and *Apparel* magazine named Kokatat one of the top innovators of 2015, placing them on the cover. O'Meara said, "The fun part for me is to be the innovator. To always be pushing the envelope in both product design and production techniques."

The Process

"We spend an equal amount of time designing our production floor, our machinery and getting feedback as we do coming up with innovative designs," Turner said.

Feedback comes from consumers, but also employees. The opinion of Kokatat employees ranks very high for O'Meara, who first sourced local manufacturing because of a personal interest in improving local jobs in the depressed Humboldt County area. "If you outsource you do away with those jobs," O'Meara said. "And those jobs are not just jobs, but human beings."

Many employees have been with the company for upwards of 20 years. They have skills completely unique to the industry. O'Meara added, "anybody on the production floor can stop the production line at any time if something doesn't look right."

Each quarter, the factory shuts down mid-day to hold a party in honor of the staff. "It's part of the culture Steve has built," said Turner.

Local manufacturing means production levels are smaller, but Kokatat doesn't see that as a negative. O'Meara said, "We don't have a lot of inventory. When you outsource you have to get big batches and have a high rate of discontinued products that have to be discounted."

The Potential

The future of Made in the U.S.A. is still unclear, even for brands like Kokatat. "One of the biggest challenges is that it's harder to get raw materials. We have to import them," O'Meara said. Kokatat's largest import is Gaia PVC free flotation foam used in all Kokatat life vests. Gaia foam is only available through Kokatat's Asian manufacturer.

The only way to reverse the depressed trend of the national textile infrastructure, said O'Meara is to "piggy back on what is here now." Rebuilding also means, "more raw goods at a slightly higher cost...and that's hard," he admitted.

Against the odds, Kokatat is still creating high-quality technical garments in the U.S., and not only for watersports enthusiasts, but for the Coast Guard, Navy Seals and other military and government groups.

"We're able to meet with Special Forces and get down and dirty about what they need to protect themselves," said O'Meara. Knowing the company is involved in every stage of production only serves to reflect the quality of its products as they are put to the test.

Looking to Kokatat as a model for stateside manufacturing, the future of Made in the U.S.A. is adaptive, innovative and quality-driven. ■

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Photo courtesy Orvis

Fly Fishing Gains New Followers

Since time immemorial, or at least since I've paid attention over the past 20-some years, fly fishing has tried to become younger, the siren call being, "Our clientele is dying." But new products, a broader angling lifestyle, and women's specific gear is breathing new life into the sport.

By Greg Thomas

Fly fishing being perceived as old men wearing tweed isn't lost on anyone, including this niche category's mega-beast, The Orvis Company of Manchester, VT. That's why Orvis recently hosted a group of journalists to deliver a clear message: Orvis is not old, its product line is fresh and progressive, and those safari-style fishing shirts and pants with oversized pockets and venting systems aren't required for entry into America's trout streams.

In fact, **Orvis'** new line of technical fishing shirts come pocketless, if desired, and utilizes modern fabrics and technology- its dri-release Casting T being one example, as well as the Swan Valley plaid cowboy shirt, which is touted to be as trendy on the water as it is on the town.



Orvis dri-release Casting T



Orvis Swan Valley Plaid Cowboy Shirt

You'll see a youthful push in their ad campaigns, too, which showcase long-bearded hipsters wading into rivers and attractive, youthful women making big hucks for exotic and challenging fish like tarpon, permit and giant trevally.

Orvis isn't the only company taking a youthful vibe to heart; no fly-fishing oriented company broadcasts such a youthful and hip image as Howler Brothers.

Howler Brothers was founded in 2011 when band members from the Austin, TX-based Wrinkle Neck Mules, who fish and surf, jumped into



Photo courtesy Howler Brothers



From Left to Right: Howler Brothers Andy Stepanian, Director Mason Brent and Chase Heard

apparel. This stemmed from one band member, Andy Stepanian, fishing in a 1970s-era long-sleeve, polyester shirt complete with pearl-snap front and embroidered flowers across the shoulders. He liked the look but the thing nearly melted when wet. Stepanian and his cohorts recreated the design, called it the Gaucho, and incorporated a lightweight, quick-drying poly-cotton blend and teaming modernization with the classic pleated chest pockets, pearl snaps and custom embroidery (ranging from grasshoppers to pelicans).

Matched with a slate of funky trucker hats, some showcasing their now somewhat iconic howler monkey logo, and a smorgasbord of branded accessories, including Smith sunglasses, Topo Design backpacks, Kool Kans glasses and Oxide whiskey cups, plus Danny Hess handplanes and Yeti coolers, Howler is now firmly entrenched as fly fishing's hip fashion leader.



Howler Brothers Gaucho Snapshirt and Rooster detail

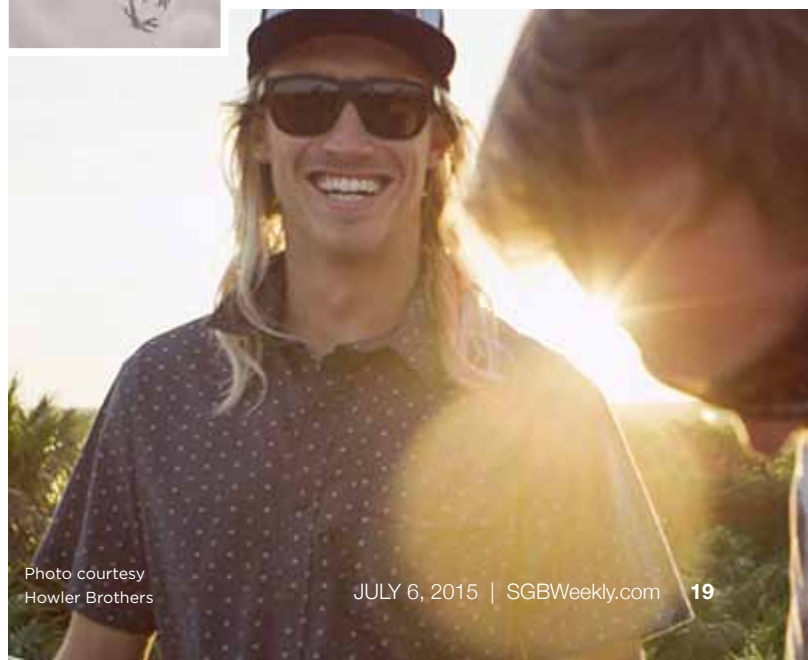


Photo courtesy Howler Brothers



Ex Officio Bugsaway collection

Style evolution aside, it's not to suggest the tried and true are resting on their laurels. In fact, **Ex Officio**, which built the first modern-day fly-fishing specific shirt in 1987, now offers a modern lineup that includes its odor-resistant Give-N-Go performance underwear and its Bugsaway collection, which combines sun protection, insect repellent and dri-release technology in each garment. Although seemingly unimportant in apparel design, UV and insect protection is key.



CLICK TO PLAY

Photo courtesy ExOfficio



Photo courtesy Patagonia

Women Specific

Today, women may select female specific waders from several manufactures, cuts and designs that fit better than a standard men's wader. The growth of women specific fly-fishing apparel may signify that the sport is not strictly a boy's club any longer.



Bart Bonime,
Director
Fishing
Patagonia

According to Bart Bonime, director of fishing at Patagonia, it's no secret that women are a standout growth opportunity. In 2014 **Patagonia** went after that market segment offering female-specific waders and wading jackets. They'll follow in spring 2017 with an assortment of new women's product, including lightweight wading boots.

"Our launch of a women's line was surprisingly successful," Bonime said. "We did the right advertising, PR and point of sale - all the backend work to promote the line..."

From a product standpoint most manufacturers would take a men's product, put some pink on it, make it in a smaller size and call it a women's wader. But the new female fly-fisher wants something designed for them and they don't want pink trim. They

want to be taken seriously in the sport. Our waders are feature-rich and technically correct. We spent a lot of time on fit and that is critical - that effort resonates with the core female customer."



Tom Rosenbauer, Marketing Director, Orvis

Bonime added, "Our women's business, right out of the gate, was 12 to 13 percent of our overall business. It's an area we will continue to focus on."

Bonime isn't the only one seeing growth in the women's category. According to Tom Rosenbauer, marketing director at Orvis, the

floodgates haven't opened, but steady growth is the trend.

"We are definitely seeing growth in women's wader sales and I think that is because we have a good fit. Everyone wishes we'd see more women in fly fishing, and there are definitely more women than there were five years ago, but it's not a huge influx. But it is steady and healthy growth," he said.

Inviting Beginners

Another current trend in fly fishing is simplicity. Fly fishing is often associated with pretentious pseudo-scholars speaking Latin, discussing nothing more interesting than the reasons a mayfly might have two tails instead of three. Not anymore.



Nine-year-old Lola Randolph was helped through the tenkara process by Yvon Chouinard. The Patagonia founder is eager to involve the younger generation — the future conservationists and anglers.

Over the past few years **Tenkara USA** introduced beginners to a modern version of an ancient Japanese fishing method that has been cross-promoted by Patagonia and the publication of Yvon Chouinard’s book, *Simple Fly Fishing*.

Tenkara is fly fishing, but the method focuses on casting and catching trout and the hardware lacks a reel. By eliminating line management from the equation even beginning anglers stand a good chance to catch fish.

“Tenkara is the gateway for people to get into fly fishing,” Bonnime said. “It’s a successful method because it’s relatively inexpensive to get into and it’s simple. Fishing a tenkara rod simplifies the whole process. Then, once a person masters tenkara they’ll start looking at bigger streams, bigger fish and, ultimately, saltwater, which brings on another world of gear needs.”

Part of simplicity in fly fishing may have to do with the weather. Anglers are wet wading (wearing lightweight shorts or pants versus full waders) due to increased water temperature early in the season. This means that instead of wearing heavy boots some anglers may opt for lightweight, felt bottomed wading boots or even non-traditional river shoes, such as **Chaco’s** Outcross Evo 2 that feature closed construction mesh with a stretch collar, neoprene lining and a protective toe cap. These shoes lack rock-gripping felt or spiked soles, but are perfect for the wilderness experience, that being hiking into remote streams, spending almost as much time on the trail as in the water. Fortunately, they are pretty comfortable while standing and casting from the bow of a raft or driftboat, too.

Fly fishing might not appeal to the masses, but manufacturers are taking steps to make a day on the water more comfortable and enjoyable for everyone, and furthermore, current trends show these efforts are working to increase participation and enjoyment. ■



Yvon Chouinard’s with his book, *Simple Fly Fishing*



Chaco Outcross Evo 2

INDUSTRY CALENDAR



Photo courtesy
Strider Bikes

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t 203.426.1320
nssf.org

National Sporting Goods Association
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Mount Prospect, IL 60056
t 847.296.6742
nsga.org

Nation's Best Sports
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Ft. Worth, TX 76117
t 817.788.0034
nbs.com

Outdoor Industry Association
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Boulder, CO 80301
t 303.444.3353
outdoorindustry.org

Sports & Fitness Industry Association
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Silver Spring, MD 20910
t 301.495.6321
sfia.org

Snow Sports Industries America
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snowsports.org

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JULY

- 8-9 Agenda Long Beach
Long Beach, CA
- 10-12 ADA Spring Show
Minneapolis, MN
- 14-17 ASA-ICAST International Sport Fishing Expo
Orlando, FL
- 15-18 European Outdoor Trade Fair
Friedrichshafen, Germany
- 15-16 EORA Summer Market
Ellicott City, MD
- 15-16 EORA Summer Market
Manchester, NH
- 19-21 Project New York
New York, NY
- 20-21 Agenda New York
New York, NY

AUGUST

- 4-6 FFANY
New York, NY
- 5-7 BCA International Billiard & Home Recreation Expo
Las Vegas, NV
- 5-8 Outdoor Retailer Summer Market
Salt Lake City, UT
- 13-15 Sports, Inc. Outdoor Show
San Antonio, TX
- 16-18 EORA Greenville Summer Market
Greenville, SC
- 17-19 MAGIC Show
Las Vegas, NV
- 17-19 Agenda Las Vegas
Las Vegas, NV
- 20-23 NBS Fall Semi-Annual Market
Ft. Worth, TX
- 24-26 EORA Killington Primary Expo Show
Killington, VT
- 26-29 Eurobike
Friedrichshafen, Germany

SEPTEMBER

- 1-3 WDI Worldwide Fall Show
Reno, NV
- 8-10 SFIA Industry Leaders Summit
New Orleans, LA
- 10-12 Imprinted Sportswear Show
Orlando, FL
- 10-12 Surf Expo
Orlando, FL
- 16-18 Interbike International Trade Expo
Las Vegas, NV

OCTOBER

- 5-7 OIA Rendezvous
Seattle, WA
- 5-7 Shop.org Digital Summit 2015
Philadelphia, PA
- 8-9 The Retailing Summit
Dallas, TX
- 15-17 Imprinted Sportswear Show
Ft. Worth, TX
- 27-30 NASGW Annual Meeting & Expo
Reno, NV
- 29-31 ADA Fall Buying Show
Baltimore, MD

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A man with a beard and dark hair, wearing a teal t-shirt and black climbing gloves, is climbing a thick rope. He is smiling and looking down. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with dry grass and trees.

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