FIELD NOTES NOVEMBER 3, 2026

STA, Northern Division Meeting 2026



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Field notes from the textile industry: a tour of the Manufacturing Solutions Center in Conover, NC, and a day of speakers at the Southern Textile Association's annual Northern Division meeting.

The Southern Textile Association, STA, is a 117-year-old non-profit trade organization established in 1908 that connects and educates professionals across the U.S. textile manufacturing industry.

The room is always full of tenured multi-generational business owners and increasingly includes a few new generation attendees looking to influence and bring new concepts to invigorate our traditional American textile manufacturing industry.

Last month's Northern Division meeting event began with a tour of the Manufacturing Solutions Center, MSC facility in Conover, NC.

The Manufacturing Solutions Center

MSC is part of the Textile Engine consortium driving our industry forward supporting start ups and small manufacturer. I was pleasantly pleased to see one of the achievements of the expanded MSC II to the industry is Nufabrx's consumer brand and retail business were sold to Tallayne Holdings in September 2023.

More background on the MSC II facility is in this March 2023 *Textile World* article.

Currently the MSC II production facility's private owner/landlord is Whiskbroom, an investment group co-owned by Ingram Walters. Companies graduating from MSC's incubator rent manufacturing space



from Whiskbroom in approximately 45,000 square feet of the building. MSC manages the other portion containing shared labs, prototyping facilities, and meeting space. (Source: *BusinessNC*, July 2023)

Automating the t-shirt

The highlight of the tour, and completely open source, is one side of MSC I is dedicated to Henderson Sewing testing dedicated to the creation of automated t-shirt sewing.

The team has made big improvements in their self made combination of sewing stations aligned with robotic arms primarily using air suction to pick up the fabric. There exists a bottleneck of human interaction to ensure the t-shirt is aligned with the correct size plate.

The invention still has a long way to go to match or exceed the standard production time of a t-shirt cut&sew process.

There are a lot of options for something to go wrong in the automation process.

An amazing innovation and applauding the efforts, though the downside is there are a lot of options for something to go wrong in the automation process.

It is still at the concept stage and the investment payoff is TBD based on the trade-off and on-going evolution of technological advances.

The Henderson sewing operators welcomed photos and any feedback from the public.

The speakers

The main event was a series of speakers:

> **Upcycle Fiber**, Textile Waste/ Textile-to-Textile, T2T expanding materials collection centers nationwide. In the next 8 months plan to have a new facility fully operational in Lancaster, SC

> **XR & AI:** West Piedmont Community College received NSF money to maximize the use of XR = Extended Reality combining VR, AR, MR in order to train new workforce to virtually train and interact with industry machinery

> **VOLT** is a young high data intelligence company focused on driving migration to AI use. They help companies who are navigating how to maximize AI for textile manufacturing steps are to adapt in three steps: 1. Foundation Layer, 2. Context Layer, 3. Agentic Layer

The most impactful presentations were from two industry leaders:

1. Economic report by Mark Vitner, of Piedmont Crescent Capital and S.E. Economic Advisors who reported a grim report for US industry yarn output down 15% YOY and fabric mill output down 6.3% YOY according to the ISM manufacturing index. Reach out to Courtney for the presentation slides with more detailed analysis.



Rep. Pat Harrington at the STA meeting.

2. The highly informative speech from TNC10 House Representative Pat Harrington who is also a manufacturing business owner was enlightening to enforce that textiles are a national security priority for the government. The downside is that none of the 12,000 bills under consideration will see the light of day unless Washington DC can find a way to solve for appropriations when they meet again this year. Pat is co-chair of the Berry Amendment caucus where he fights daily for our US manufacturing rights.

Keep on fighting. Onwards!

With difficulty comes opportunity

One attendee who praised the reports and industry updates Gherzi publishes of great value to business also mentioned the difficulty of offering management consulting support as "when business is down the last thing to bring in is a consultant."

I beg to differ – with difficulty comes opportunity.

Industry needs new perspectives and challenging view points backed by facts and hard cumulative data in addition to correlational insight in order to pivot in the right direction.

Where in the bend is the best place to pivot?

When is the most opportune timing for the best turning point?

Let Gherzi support you to ensure you don't miss a pivotal opportunity!

Onwards!



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Courtney Caneer-Williams is a Consultant with Gherzi Americas. A global sourcing and manufacturing executive in fiber, textiles, and apparel, she leads products from concept to consumer with expertise in sustainable innovation, operational excellence, and regulatory compliance.