ARMD Alumni in Product Development at Target

Everyone obsesses over Target’s affordable must-have fashions and adorable home goods, but few know that those products are designed right here in the Midwest at Target’s Minneapolis headquarters. The Product Design and Development (PD&D) team is responsible for developing Target’s private label lines from testing textiles to writing specsheets. Many NDSU Apparel, Retail Merchandising and Design alumni are part of this team. We interviewed a few of them about their jobs.

Carmen Wade works in PD&D at Target as a Fabric Engineer for women’s, girls’, baby girls’, and denim fabrics. “I research and develop fabric and wash to fulfill the trend, testing and aesthetics requirements needed by design to execute their vision and the overarching brand values,” Carmen said. She selects fabrics, trims and finishes that combine quality and affordability to meet Target’s “Expect More, Pay Less” promise. “It’s easy to design a luxury product, and it’s easy to design a cheap product, but designing an affordable quality item can be a challenge,” she said. Her job involves a lot of emailing and working with overseas vendors to meet tight deadlines. She must also keep up on new developments within the industry, especially in denim, to ensure Target leads the market, not just follows the trends. “The indigo industry is notoriously ‘dirty,’ using massive amounts of water and traditionally harmful chemicals,” Carmen noted. “Our leaders understand and champion the use of sustainable practices regardless of the possible price increase.”

As a Principal Technical Designer, Kristy Janigo writes specifications, drafts garment flats, and completes fit sessions for women’s fashion and exclusive designer collaborations. She started working for Target right after graduation from NDSU in 2006. In 2011, she began working in higher education, but she returned to Target in 2014. Kristy’s week is usually spent in design meetings, emailing overseas partners, and analyzing the fit, styling, and construction of samples, but her job is exciting and ever-evolving. “Once, I found out that I had to go on an international business trip just a few days before I needed to depart to China to fit product for a new brand launch,” she said. Kristy also serves on Target’s Diversity and Inclusion committee, which offers a summer course for high school students on product design and development.

Jodie Pahl is a Lead Product Development Manager in her 13th year at Target. While the creative, technical and textile designers focus on their individual roles, she manages the big picture. “I bring each area together - merchants, sourcing, design, packaging - to work through product development questions and timelines,” Jodie said. “Developing products can have roadblocks, so I am there to help remove them for the team so that merchandise can be ready to flow to the stores.”

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Jodie has to keep tabs on the product development process, making sure issues are resolved and production stays on the correct timeline. Of course, problems arise during the process, from product not coming in time for a major meeting to complete strategy shifts.

“The most challenging part of my job is redirecting the team and focusing them in times of difficulty,” Jodie said. “While collaboration is key, it is also my job to inform the team of what realistically can be achieved and direct them how we can get it accomplished.”

Brooke Schommer works for Target as a Strategic Sourcing Lead. Her job involves sourcing everything Target stores need to run, from paper towels to automatic doors. “I impact Target as a whole every day in the strategies I drive, through the suppliers and contracts I execute,” Brooke said. Her work ensures that Target captures the highest revenues and lowest expenses possible. Brooke also serves on the NDSU Board of Visitors and believes her education from NDSU gave her the transferable skills to succeed in her career. “My degree from NDSU is one of my best assets,” she said.

Both Brooke and Jodie agree that their passionate, generous, and talented coworkers are the best part about working at Target Headquarters. Carmen and Kristy love that Target supports their personal goals and continued education. “If there is an area of technology or fibers you are passionate about, you are encouraged to find tradeshows and training to learn more and to deepen you knowledge,” Carmen said. Kristy even worked full time for Target while completing her Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota. “Target really ‘gets it’ that graduate education leads to innovation and improves creative and analytical capabilities of employees,” Kristy said. “They are flexible and supportive of their employees’ endeavors, valuing who they are both at work and outside work.” And of course they all love creating amazing products every day. “There is something pretty satisfying about knowing you are creating the clothes that the women, men and kids of America are wearing,” Carmen said.

Target Supports NDSU Apparel, Retail Merchandising and Design

In addition to providing exciting careers for graduates of NDSU, Target supports the ARMD program in other ways. Study tours to Minneapolis for undergrads always include almost an entire day at Target headquarters. In 2016, we spent the time in the PD&D area and heard from designers about how Target develops new products. In 2014, we spent time at a Target store in New Brighton and learned from the visual team about the merchandising of products in store.

Faculty in the department have been fortunate to be part of a College Consortium group and have spent four days each of the last two summers learning about the operations of this successful retailer. Many resources for teaching are provided, and networking is done between faculty and the Target professionals. Plans are to continue this learning opportunity in August of 2017.

ARMD students at Target Headquarters in 2014
Emily Reynolds Historic Costume Collection on Display

Three exhibitions were featured in the ERHCC gallery this year: Embellishments, Surviving Winter: Coat Styles Through Time, and Wedding Gown Aesthetics: 1944 – 1974.

Decorative details were highlighted in the show Embellishments. A formal gown worn by the wife of musician Lawrence Welk is pictured. Its fitted bodice and sleeves are embellished with silk ribbon and silver foil embroidery. A braid of silk jersey covers the waistline seam.

The highlight of Surviving Winter was a man’s storm coat called the “North Dakotan”. It was designed in the 1960s by Herman Stern of Straus Clothing, to offer a coat suited to the bitter Arctic cold winters in North Dakota. Cohen-Feldman of St. Paul, Minnesota, made the coats exclusively for Straus. Extra heavy-weight wool/mohair blend fabric from Scotland, mouton fur lining and an otter fur collar were used. As cars’ designs and heating systems improved in the 1970s, this extra warmth was not needed and the style was discontinued.

Wedding Gown Aesthetics: 1944 – 1974 featured iconic wedding gown styles. Included were a body skimming gown with a trailing cathedral-length train from 1944. Another gown was the fit-and-full style popularized by Dior’s New Look. This silhouette was standard in gowns from 1950s to the 1960s. Designers added historic elements like back bustles to the trains and used elaborate fabrics like Chantilly lace. A third gown was from 1974 and featured a floor-length gown with a softly draped hood. The style is reminiscent of ritual attire of the priestesses of Vesta, goddess of the hearth in ancient Rome. A Qiana knit jersey fabric with a pearl-like sheen was used in this gown.

To see more, visit www.ndsu.edu/erhcc and “like” the Facebook page at www.facebook.com/erhcc.

Alumna Kathy Swantko’s FabricLink Network

Kathy Swantko, a 1969 graduate of the NDSU Textiles & Clothing program, is the founder and president of the FabricLink Network. The network is comprised of two websites. FabricLink.com spreads textile information from the trade to consumers, educating them to be smarter shoppers. TheTechnicalCenter.com caters to the textile industry itself by providing information, promotion, and networking opportunities.

“I plan and manage how our two websites address the needs of the consumer and the textile industry,” Ms. Swantko said. “I also do editorial writing for both websites.” With over 40 years of experience in textiles, she is more than qualified to educate and inform consumers and industry professionals.

After graduation from NDSU, Ms. Swantko worked as a buyer for department stores and as the assistant director of fashion promotion for Simplicity Patterns before founding Retail Marketing Services, a textile market research company. She later created a seminar on textile fibers to help fiber producers craft the right message to sell their products at retail.

Ms. Swantko started the trade-to-consumer Fabric Link website in 1995. She then launched the trade-to-trade sister site, The Technical Center, in 2003. Together, the websites see about 100,000 visitors a month who come to network, market their products, and learn about the latest textile trends and developments.

Ms. Swantko loves learning about new advancements in textiles, especially today with so many technical advancements rapidly changing the industry. "Textiles and fashion are constantly changing and are driven by technologies which were not available or known about 10 or even five years ago," she said. “There are technical advances like Smart Textiles/E-textiles, and developments like spider silk and graphene fibers and fabrics that are setting the pace. There are E-textiles that can monitor your body functions, like heart rate, breathing and stress.”

These innovations are changing how apparel is viewed and creating exciting opportunities for the future. Ms. Swantko sees current fabric trends crossing over between end-use markets, which include apparel, home, medical, industrial and sporting goods. She also notes that key fashion trends for textiles this year include bright colors paired with black, hand-painted looks, and various denim treatments and types. With so many ever-changing developments in the textiles world, it’s great that FabricLink Network clients have this resource to educate, promote, and network within the industry.

Kathy Swantko, founder of FabricLink Network

Embellished detail on Mrs. Lawrence Welk’s gown
FABO Fashion Show 2017: Cirque Du Style

NDSU’s Fashion, Apparel and Business Organization (FABO) held their 16th annual spring fashion show April 26 in the Memorial Union Ballroom. This year’s theme, Cirque Du Style, was inspired by a vintage circus concept and incorporated three unique subthemes to show off various styles: Ringmaster, Hall of Mirrors and Wild Thing.

Ringmaster featured bold, edgy, confident looks with strong structure in darker colors. Hall of Mirrors showed off glamorous, luminous formal and casual wear in a softer color palette. Finally, Wild Thing looks featured bright colors, mixed patterns, and experimental styling.

In addition to the 17 local retailers highlighted in the show, 17 different student designers also debuted their designs on the runway. These students showed off the designs they completed for the Apparel Construction & Fit and Pattern Drafting & Grading classes. The looks showed off each designer’s personal aesthetic through their garments, including a boho mixed print dress, graphic windowpane set with embroidery, and red satin gown with traditional Native American beading.

FABO members gained great experience in the months of work they put into the show. They collaborated on ideas for the theme, recruited stores and models to participate, directed and organized hair and makeup with Josef’s School of Hair Design, designed and created the runway set, cut together the music and slideshow, organized student designers, and promoted the show to the public.

This year’s show set the bar high with its immersive theme. Guest performers interspersed throughout the show entertained the crowd with a dance number and yoyo performance. Guests enjoyed popcorn, took pictures at the photo booth, and checked out the student projects that were displayed. A few even went home with door prize gift cards donated by Scheels and the NDSU Bookstore.

Editor’s Note: We hope you’ve enjoyed this newsletter. If you have ideas for future newsletters or would like to share about your career, please email Linda Manikowske at linda.manikowske@ndsu.edu.