

Oregon business gives ruined clothes a second chance

By **JORDAN HERNANDEZ**
For The Oregonian

Apparel companies often end up with piles of garments whose quality wasn't up to usual production standards. Perhaps their hem or stitching is inconsistent, or they've suffered rips or holes along the way.

Many big companies now send their discards to Cascade Locks, where The Renewal Workshop can fix them.

The company takes discarded apparel and textiles and repairs them for sale at a slight discount. If the garment isn't recoverable, the materials are then recycled. The Renewal Workshop collects data on everything that flows through its factories, and those numbers are to partner brands to help them improve the production and design of future products.

The goal is a zero-waste system that squeezes value out of what has already been created as a way of serving customers, partners and the planet.

Jeff Denby and Nicole Bassett founded The Renewal Workshop in 2015 as a response to what they saw as broken business model of the apparel industry. There was an overflow of clothing and garments ending up in landfills due to the rise in large fast-fashion companies. Denby and Bassett saw an opportunity for companies to grow their revenue without using any more resources — and to reduce waste along the way.

They built their first factory in Cascade Locks in 2016. Bassett, who lives in Hood River, was looking to expand the company from a smaller warehouse and needed a location with proper manufacturing space. Cascade Locks had what she was looking for in terms of space and location.

The company also opened a second factory in Amsterdam in 2019.

Both Bassett and Denby bring expertise



The Renewal Workshop co-founders Jeff Denby and Nicole Bassett.

in apparel, manufacturing and logistics. Bassett worked at brands including Patagonia and Prana, managing their sustainability and social responsibility programs, while Denby worked in manufacturing before founding an organic cotton apparel company, Pact.

The Renewal Workshop employs 42 workers at their Cascade Locks location. Every day, they receive shipments of defective products from their brand partners, who are their sole customers. Those items are cleaned, repaired and inspected and made available for resale on "recommerce" web-

sites set up by The Renewal Workshops' clients, for which the company also boxes and ships repaired items to buyers.

"It is unique for brands to allow someone else to fix their products," Bassett said. "We invested a lot into developing repair standards so that brands could feel confident in the quality of the work we do so that they can stand behind their products being sold as renewed."

With both companies benefitting from the resale and brand goodwill, The Renewal Workshop has been able to grow its pro-

file and attract new clients. Its partners now include Carhartt, Pottery Barn, Champion and New Balance.

While apparel is a significant industry in Oregon — home to national brands like Nike and Columbia Sportswear, as well as Adidas' North American headquarters — apparel manufacturing is rarer, accounting for just 930 jobs at 70 businesses statewide in 2020.

And to have those jobs in a city like Cascade Locks is even rarer, said Dallas Fridley, a regional economist for the Oregon Employment Department.

"Small communities in rural Oregon, like Cascade Locks, do face challenges in attracting startup businesses and businesses looking for room to expand," Fridley said. But he said that Cascade Locks benefits from advantages that other small communities lack, like easy access to an interstate and the Bridge of the Gods providing a Columbia River crossing to Washington.

And the Port of Cascade Locks has been active in economic development, particularly by providing space for businesses based in Hood River and other parts of the Columbia River Gorge to expand.

Like most businesses, The Renewal Workshop had to adapt its practices during the pandemic, due to the proximity of workers within their warehouses, as well as the economic hit the retail industry took due to lack of sales and production shortages. Since The Renewal Workshop depends on their brand partners to fix their garments, they were affected by the lack of sales from big retailers.

"We definitely had to change our operations to keep everyone safe like spacing out the production facility," Bassett said.

But the company also put its sewing skills to work making hospital gowns and masks for local clinics and hospitals.

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Today's Cryptoquip Clue: D equals P

1-18 CRYPTOQUIP

RA TCXSECAMP, MB FBP XSRAT

JBEQ YQBYDQ ORDD XLCRA

YQX YCLLBXJ XB JCF "AQYCDR

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