

FINANCE & COMMERCE

[Log in](#) | [Manage Account](#)
[Subscribe](#)

- [Home »](#)
 - [News »](#)
 - [Special Sections »](#)
 - [Public Notice](#)
 - [Events »](#)
 - [Marketplace »](#)
 - [Digital Edition](#)
- [Finance & Commerce](#) > [Special Sections](#) > [Entrepreneurial](#) > Entrepreneurial: The Makers Coalition sews up training for future workers

Entrepreneurial: The Makers Coalition sews up training for future workers

Posted: 3:37 pm Mon, May 13, 2013

By Nancy Crotti

Tags: [Debra Kerrigan](#), [Dunwoody College](#), [Greater Twin Cities United Way](#), [J.C. Sewing](#), [J.W. Hulme Co.](#), [Jen Guarino](#), [Lifetrack](#), [Lifetrack Resources](#), [Makers Coalition](#), [Marked Inc.](#), [Scott Loeser](#), [The Makers Coalition](#), [Women Investing in the Next Generation](#)



Instructor Ruth Kirchner (at right,

standing), who works at Kelle Co., teaches students in a class called “Introduction to Sewing and the Process of Production,” at the Dunwoody College of Technology in Minneapolis. The program is sponsored by the Makers Coalition, an alliance of Minnesota companies that need skilled sewing machine operators, as well as Dunwoody and Lifetrack Resources. (SUBMITTED PHOTO)

An effort to train new workers in industrial sewing has given a Minneapolis resident the springboard to start his own business.

Scott Loeser and 14 others have nearly completed the first class organized by [The Makers Coalition](#), an alliance of Minnesota companies that need skilled sewing machine operators, [Dunwoody College](#) in Minneapolis and [Lifetrack Resources](#), a St. Paul social service agency.

Loeser’s classmates, who include low-income people and immigrants with varying levels of sewing experience, have lined up jobs with coalition members after completing the course. A second group will begin classes in June.

Loeser, 35, traveled the world as a product development specialist for Gander Mountain and other companies. Now he is starting his own business, Marked Inc., to manufacture and market men’s leather bags from cowhide that bears its ranch’s brand or is otherwise marked and thus rejected by other manufacturers. He had such a bag made for himself four years ago and has fielded questions about it ever since.

J.C. Sewing of Duluth will cut and sew the bags from Colombian leather and fabric made in the United States. Loeser plans to sell initially through Minneapolis men’s boutiques. He is using an undisclosed amount of family money for the startup and is considering a Kickstarter campaign to raise \$10,000 to \$20,000.

Marked’s target market is a cross between Indiana Jones and classic modern designer Tom Ford — someone with a sense of adventure and old-world style.

“With Marked, I’m saying you can be the Fortune 500 CEO and you’re not afraid to roll your sleeves up in the board room because you’ve got tattoos on,” he said.

Businesses have historically worked with community and technical colleges to train workers. The 20-member Makers Coalition might not have coalesced so quickly if not for a St. Paul Area Chamber of Commerce event in January 2012. Debra Kerrigan, dean of work force training and continuing education at Dunwoody, had heard Jen Guarino, president of leather bag manufacturer [J.W. Hulme Co.](#), lament the lack of skilled labor at her company as she accepted an award at the event.

Kerrigan offered to organize a sewing course if Guarino could prove a wider need. Guarino contacted other manufacturers as well as Lifetrack, whose business service department connects employers with workers, arranges for training and advocates for immigrants and others who have difficulty finding work.

Within a month, representatives of the first nine companies to join the coalition met with Kerrigan. A Faribault company said it needed nine workers immediately; the rest said they needed at least three.

“We probably have 90 openings right now,” Guarino recently said of her St. Paul-based company. “We have an

aging population in our factories. They're all approaching retirement age. That's not even counting replacing those people when they retire."

Those needs and a heightened interest among consumers for American-made products helped persuade Kerrigan to offer the course.

The \$3,700 tuition would have proved prohibitive to many immigrant students and one who is homeless. Women Investing in the Next Generation (WINGs), a fundraising organization affiliated with the [Greater Twin Cities United Way](#), donated \$75,000 to Lifetrack for scholarships for the 22-week course. RENEW Minneapolis, a city job-training program, also contributed to cover scholarships for the first year.

Seventy percent of the students are women, and their average age is 37, Kerrigan noted. Some sewed in their native countries but want the industry completion certificate conferred by the course; others are fashion designers who want to learn sewing.

WINGs donors were happy to help, according to Lan Freitag, giving communities manager at the United Way.

"They saw innovation in the program and really saw that there was a huge need not only in the local businesses but really kind of the skill-based training," Freitag said.

Dunwoody last offered a sewing class in the 1940s, so manufacturers donated about \$20,000 worth of sewing machines, other equipment and materials to help students learn math and measuring, the handling of leather and fine fabrics, sewing techniques, machine troubleshooting, ergonomics and safety when using laser cutters.

Guarino expects to pay \$10 to \$16 per hour, plus benefits. Wages may vary by company and skill level, she added.

With materials and manufacturing lined up, why is Loeser taking the course?

"If I'm going to be in this type of business and create my own label, then 'gol-darn-it,' I'd better know how to put the stuff together," he said. "I want to learn how to create and how to sew."

He is planning a series of five bags retailing for about \$300 apiece and available in July. Loeser would like to own a boutique selling the bags in Uptown, with workers sewing bags in the back.

"I want it to be a global brand," he added. "If I can find distribution outside of the United States, then that's wonderful because that equals volume and volume equals more jobs."



This entry was posted on Monday, May 13th, 2013 at 3:37 pm and is filed under [Entrepreneurial](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can skip to the end and leave a response. Pinging is currently not allowed.

« [Bobcat breaks ground on Bismarck facility](#) 🔑
[Vikings stadium plans to be unveiled Monday evening](#) »

Leave a Reply

<input type="text"/>	Name (required)
<input type="text"/>	Mail (will not be published) (required)
<input type="text"/>	Website

skintshn

House

[Privacy & Terms](#)



Submit Comment

- Notify me of follow-up comments by email.
- Notify me of new posts by email.

New to our site? To view a breakdown of our content and subscription options, [click here](#).

Stay Connected With Us

F&C Email Alert



Free business news updates every weekday.

Enter Email:

Submit

Saint Paul Legal Ledger | POLITICS IN MINNESOTA

CapitolReport

LEADERS IN PUBLIC POLICY 2013

Recognizing significant contributions to Minnesota's political, public policy or civic environment.

NOMINATE HERE
Deadline is May 24



Recent Activity

Login

You need to be logged into Facebook to see your friends' recent activity.



Progress MN: Skyline Exhibits

2 people recommended this.



Finance & Commerce

Like

911 people like Finance & Commerce.



Facebook social plugin

Facebook social plugin

YAHOO! FINANCE

Enter Symbol **SEARCH**

Quote Web

IRET - NYQ	\$9.73	0.00 0.00%
Investors Real Estate Trust Sha		
MDT - NYQ	\$49.92	0.00 0.00%
Medtronic Inc. Common Stock		
AMP - NYQ	\$80.86	0.00 0.00%
Ameriprise Financial, Inc. Comm		
XEL - NYQ	\$30.03	0.00 0.00%
Xcel Energy Inc. Common Stock		
TGT - NYQ	\$69.44	0.00 0.00%
Target Corporation Common Stock		

ADD QUOTES TO YOUR SITE

QUOTES DELAYED! HANGING TO HELL
BY THE REINS OF HELL

COPYRIGHT

PRIVACY

MINNESOTA LAWYER
Unsung Legal HEROES

NOMINATE your Unsung Legal Hero today!

Deadline: June 3 Click Here

[Manage My Account](#) • [Contact Us](#) • [About](#) • [Advertising](#) • [Dolan Law Books](#) • [Dolan Business Books](#) • [Privacy Policy](#) • [Subscriber Agreement](#)



Copyright © 2013, Finance and Commerce, U.S. Trust Building Suite 100, 730 Second Ave S. Minneapolis, MN 55402 (612) 333-4244