

## COLLEGE APPAREL

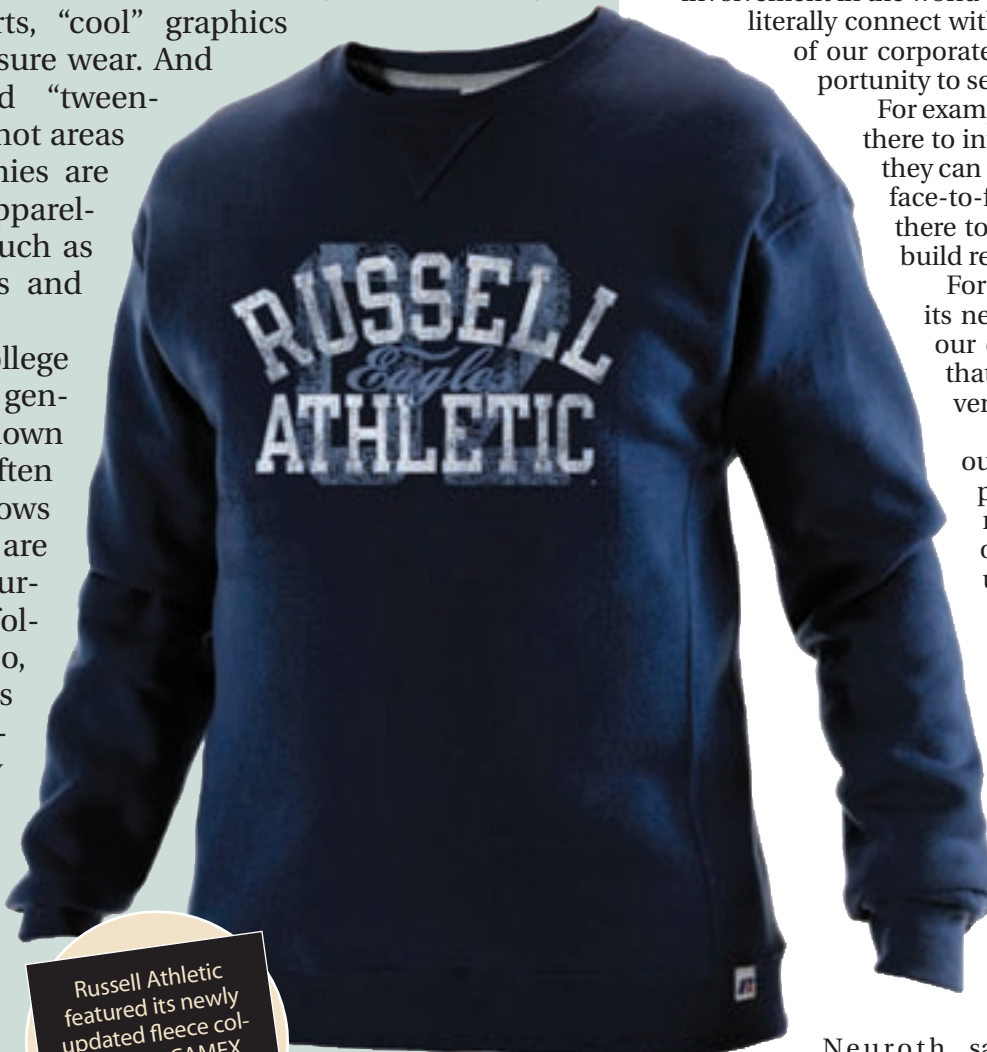
# 'Introducing' Stuff To Make It 'Exciting'

BY LARRY LAPKA  
Associate Editor

Contemporary fashion can be used as a barometer for what is hot, and what is not, among students of college age, and there is no better place to test this than at the 87th Annual Meeting and Campus Market Expo (CAMEX) 2010, which took place March 12-15 at the Orange County Convention Center, Orlando, Fla.

Fashion is generally fun, with fabrics and colors determined by need. Fleece and twill continue to be in, as are T-shirts, hoodies, sweatshirts, "cool" graphics and all types of leisure wear. And childrenswear and "tween-age" wear are also hot areas that some companies are exploring, as are apparel-linked categories such as luggage, backpacks and handbags.

In addition, college students have, for generations, been known for their activism; often what they wear shows off what cause they are aligned with. The current generation follows this path, too, wearing garments that are both environment friendly and cause oriented, but in a more muted, gentler and oftentimes humorous way.



Russell Athletic featured its newly updated fleece collection at CAMEX. (PHOTO COURTESY OF RUSSELL ATHLETIC)

## RUSSELL ATHLETIC

Julia Neuroth, marketing manager, women's retail and college stores for Russell Athletic, said CAMEX is a key forum for the company, "and we look forward every year to sharing what's new with us and learning more about our customers and the market ... often it's a chance for us to showcase our latest fashions and graphics and our new promotions."

Neuroth said that CAMEX is "extremely important" to Russell's involvement in the world of college stores "because it allows us to literally connect with market players and customers. Some of our corporate office employees really value the opportunity to see what is going on with customers."

For example, she said, "Our graphic designers are there to interact with customers in person, where they can collaborate on designs and sketch ideas face-to-face. And, our customer service team is there to meet with customers and continue to build relationships we value so much."

For CAMEX 2010, Russell Athletic featured its newly updated fleece collection. "This is our classic fleece with great new upgrades that we're excited to talk about, and we are very optimistic about it," Neuroth said.

She said fleece is "the cornerstone of our heritage" at the company, "and we're proud of this collection because it has many features in common with our original 1926 sweatshirts. We've bulked up fabric weight, added athletic side panels for a great fit and incorporated contract-back neck tape."

Neuroth added that the company was looking forward to receiving market feedback on these upgrades. "We think this fleece collection will be a big winner for us at CAMEX. This new collection features a crew neck, pullover hood, zip-front hood, closed bottom pant and open bottom pant."

Russell Athletic is also launching its new no-sew twill program, "which will allow customers to get the look of twill appliqué at a lower price point,"

Neuroth said, and what she described as "an exciting new marketing program for our customers, which will result in two Russell Athletic customers receiving a store makeover for their college store."

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## MV SPORT

Byron Reed, marketing director for MV Sport, said the CAMEX show is one of the few times during the year that reps and buyers can see the company's entire line. "They work really hard on the road, but they can't possibly take our entire line, every color ... so this is a way for us to show the depth of our line. We try to introduce stuff to make it exciting for them."

Meeting and interesting new customers is one of the essential tools that MV Sport gains from being at CAMEX. "There's always a new customer out there and this is the way to meet them," Reed said. "Sometimes, you don't have a rep in a territory, and this is the way you are going to introduce your product to them."

"And some of the smaller stores don't get called on," he continued. "This is their opportunity to see us and see us in a way that they wouldn't see us by a rep, and also for the reps to see what's new and everything we're doing. So it's kind of a double thing."

Reed said that MV Sport "still has our basics, but a lot of fashion. We are seeing women's fashions and even men's fashions as being a big trend with us because you come into college and everybody's got that basic sweatshirt, so we take it and we twist it a little bit, in colors, in patterns. In men's patterns, stripes and plaids are big trends in retail. We're not going too far out on the fashion, we're taking basic items and kind of adding that extra twist to it."

"We take that and bring it into the college market, for that younger demographic," he continued. "We still have the basics. It's always going to be the strong seller. But adding in fashion in your store can add that extra push and interest, so that's where we're trending to."

For ladies, Reed said it is all about color and pattern.

MV Sport ladies wear highlights color and pattern.



"That's coming right out of retail. I think the younger student may have understood it more than they have in the past, so we're seeing that real big."

At the show, Reed said one of his goals was to introduce the company to as many customers as possible. "We want to get the reps really excited, because we think this season is going to be a very good season. It's kind of like the kickoff for us to get everyone excited, run out there, show the new stuff, the new line. And it's the same with the customers. They get excited by us. They've seen our catalog, but coming in here is always nice."

However, like other companies, the economy has had an impact on MV Sport's business. "You can't say it didn't," Reed explained. "What kind of happened is that you have to be more valued to your customers. So, the struggle is to give them more quality and value at the same time so they can offer that to their students."

"It's just that everyone is watching their dollars, so part of it is kind of why our fashion works, because we take a basic value item but put a little twist to it to give that excitement without trying to come up with things they can't afford. So value is always there."

## ADIDAS

Building its college business is the thrust of the direction that Adidas is pursuing. The company, while still sticking to the basics, has taken a somewhat dramatic approach to ensuring further success in the college marketplace.

"Education has been a big process for us, but it has been a successful one for us during the last couple of years," said Danny Rosenberg, the company's NCAA marketing manager. "This is a writing show for us, and we want to write business here."

Rosenberg said the full breadth of Adidas was being spotlighted at CAMEX, everything from the authentic field and training merchandise to lifestyle merchandise, things that are trending in the marketplace, women's and headwear.

"Our college basics program is a big push for us right now," he noted. "It is what other vendors are doing, and have been doing for the last 20 or 30 years: the 50/50 fleece hoodies, sweats, basic screen-printed tees. We have aggressive price points and can really compete with some other vendors."

In order to spread the word on what Adidas has to offer the college market, the company goes all out during CAMEX.

"We work on the design, layouts and graphics of the booth for probably six months prior," Rosenberg noted. "We set up a full appointment log to meet with customers, and also welcome any walk-ins. It allows us to educate consumers on our capabilities: 24-piece minimums on apparel, 72-piece minimums on headwear. This is an opportunity for us to really get the word out to as many people as possible."

The company's efforts have proven to be



The full breadth of Adidas apparel for the college market was spotlighted at CAMEX.

successful. "A good example is a university which just came in. They said that they were going to look 'because it's a cool booth.' I said to them, 'Do you currently buy Adidas?' and they said, 'No, we are with someone else.' And I started talking to them about our capabilities, the fact that we serviced over 700 schools last year, and he is going to come back to meet with us."

The importance of CAMEX was echoed by James Murphy, the company's league national sales manager. "It's our opportunity to get our story out to people," he said. "It's the biggest showcase to tell our story. We reach so many people, individual reps. Reps can go in with a bag and talk about this stuff, but we enforce what they're saying from the field."

With its continued success in the college market, Adidas wants to expand its reach in this area, and change its perception with others in the marketplace.

"We want to expand on us just being known as a sideline vendor," Murphy said. "We want to be a college vendor. We have a lot of categories that can go into any school, regardless of who the sideline provider is. The lifestyle, the fan gear, the basics, we feel we have the products for the college consumer. And if you could provide a brand in these bookstores with competitive pricing and low minimums ... the stereotype that we have is that the big brands, when they walk into small colleges, and mid-tier colleges, you have high minimums, you don't really chase the business, you don't really take inventory positions."

"There are a lot of licensees out there who have come out and captured a lot of that business," Murphy continued. "Our goal is to break down that stereotype and show people that we are relative in the college world."

## DODGER INDUSTRIES

Bob Devine, vice president of athletic sales for Dodger Industries, is no stranger to CAMEX, nor is the company he works for. He has been coming to the show as part of the Dodger team for the past 16 years, and his company pre-dated his participation by a few years before he joined them.

"CAMEX is a good forum for new products," Devine said. "We usually release our new styles at the show, new programs and like this year, a new catalog. It's quite important to us. We are emphasizing a national show like this as opposed to a small, regional show for financial reasons, plus, it's just more meaningful."

Devine said that Dodger has high hopes for a new level of fleece it is offering. "It's a mid-weight 55 percent cotton/45 percent polyester fleece fabric that is available for men's, ladies and youth sizes," he explained. "We're going to offer four styles: a zip hood, a pullover hood, a crewneck and pants to match. So it's a total program for both genders with good price points."

The company has carried fleece in the past, but Devine said, "We've had different levels of 50/50, some 80/20, and we wanted to zero in on a good mid-weight at good prices. That's probably the largest offering we are featuring at the show, and we're pretty excited about it. It gives us a better foothold in the fleece business in the college market."

Dodger is also offering new T-shirts in a lighter-weight fabric, 4.5 ounces. "We call this '30 Singles,' which is a trade name for a type of yarn that is used," Devine noted. "It gives it a very soft ... I don't want to use the word sheer, but it's more of a lighter-weight T-shirt that is more contemporary than you see worn by people today. It's also a little

bit more fitted, both for the guys and the girls, which is more of a fashion look. We have one available for kids too."

One of the company's largest niches is shorts for men, women and kids. "We always add four to six new styles, we sprinkle them into both genders," Devine said. "They are usually custom color combination opportunities for the schools. We can pick up all the school colors and put it in exactly the way they want it. It's a nice niche that we have been building over the years."

Devine said his expectation of the value of the show to Dodger has been "pretty consistent" over the past years. "Last year was OK, while 2008 was probably one of the biggest years we've had, and I'm hoping that we do at least what we did in 2009 and hopefully, a little bit more, and that's a measurable goal," he said.

## ASH CITY WORLDWIDE

Bryan Vine, director of retail sales for Ash City Worldwide, said that CAMEX allows his company to get noticed. "When you come to the largest college show in North America, you get that exposure ... even though the show is smaller this year with the number of vendors, you certainly get that type of exposure for the Ash City name. So overall, it's a really, really good show."

Vine said the economic environment has impacted the business for the past several months, and this has impacted an industry which did not foresee that it could be affected by such concerns.

"Everyone had thought previously that the college market was recession-proof, and I think that we've found that that's proven to be

wrong for all of us, whether it's been the bookstores themselves or the vendors," Vine said. "We've all seen business be very soft in the past 12 months."

The good news, said Vine, indicates that the situation is turning around. "Business is picking up in the bookstores, which ultimately means an increase in our business."

With the economy picking up, Ash City is counting on the current interest in environmental responsibility to lead it to success.

"We have 53 styles of eco-products," he noted. "There's a great niche in the college market for that, and we have it well represented on display, and we have been getting some very good reaction to it."

## EPONA CLOTHING

Epona Clothing is a U.K.-based apparel company that made its CAMEX debut this year. In its apparel offerings, the company preaches both environmental responsibility as well as ethical responsibility.

The company features organic items that are considered to be what is known as "fair-trade apparel" in everything from hoodies to a leisure wear collection, T-shirts, polos, cardigans, shorts and retro sweatshirts.

"Fair trade in the U.S. is called 'trans-fair,'" said Sales Director Antony Wilson. "It's a mark in the world for commodities, you can get it with tea, coffee and bananas. It ensures the farmers get paid a reasonable, working wage, and they get a 15 percent premium that they can use on social issues. There's more and more demand for fair trade, and there doesn't seem to be many companies selling fair-trade garments."

Epona is bringing this con-



Dodger Industries featured shorts for men, women and kids at CAMEX.



Ash City offers 53 styles of eco-products for the college market.



Epona Clothing, a U.K.-based apparel company, features organic "fair-trade" apparel.

**MV**  
SPORT



cept to the U.S. “In the U.K, the leading suppliers of apparel to universities are fair-trade companies,” Wilson said. “In the U.S., we ‘kind of’ use the fair-trade mark. The American government is protective of that, so we have to say ‘fairly traded.’ We have to be a little bit careful. In the States, cotton isn’t certified fair trade yet, so we have to say fairly traded and we have to use that. So when we sell here, we have to take it off or say that this is just for an exhibition.”

The CAMEX show experience was a good one for the company. “There is a similar show in the U.K., for the U.K. universities, so we are just trying to replicate in the U.K. what we do here, the difference being nobody really knows us here,” Wilson said. “We’re getting a feel for the way to do it by being here. We have had quite a bit of interest, we’ve been contacted by a few buyers, so it’s just getting our name out a little bit.

### SAVE THE TA-TAS

Save the Ta-Tas is a unique brand, with its mission being a serious one, stopping cancer. A portion of each sale is donated to that cause. However, it takes a humorous approach to this mission.

“We get a lot of reaction,” said Sales Director Craig Kvinsland. “Most of it is positive, but you do have the people who look and can’t believe what they’re seeing. But once they find out what we’re about, they absolutely love it and embrace it.”

Last year was the company’s first foray into college bookstores and its first time at CAMEX. “We had a few bookstores before, but I just thought the college kids would embrace this,” Kvinsland said. “It’s a good cause, we have a fun, edgy shirt, and I was right, they have ac-

cepted us wholeheartedly.”

Currently, the college industry is about 20 percent of the company’s business, but it is hoping to raise those numbers to about 25 percent by pushing its line to the college market.

Kvinsland said the company is featuring its Save the Ta-Tas shirts in different styles. “We have a quarterly fashion line, so every quarter, we have a new fashion line that comes out. Right now, our baseball tee is very hot, our varsity ‘Victory Over Cancer’ shirt is very hot, and the colors that we are doing right now are muted, and understated. It’s just basically a collegiate-looking shirt, directed at the colleges.”

He added that the company is looking to introduce licensing for its products, and is in the very early stages of this initiative. “Once we get into that, I know it’s going to go up from there,” he said.

### SCENE WEAVER

Brian Sapp, national sales manager for Scene Weaver, said this year’s CAMEX was the first time the company had exhibited at the show. The company is relatively new to the college market, and it wanted to get the word out about its products at this year’s event.

“We’re featuring our adult and baby products,” Sapp said. “The reason we are featuring these is that the collegiate category is really only two and a half years old for us, and we’re kind of willing to expand the market. Word of mouth said that CAMEX is the way to do that, and this is the premier market to get the collegiate product out in front of the buyers who have interest in this category of products.”

Although the company has concerns about the econo-

my like any other, Sapp said it has been able to prosper during this difficult period because of its product offerings.

“As far as the economy, we were up almost 40 percent last year,” he noted. “We did this during a period that everybody was calling ‘economic bad times.’ Our Pickles line being baby products, and our regular, everyday line of baby products, have been ... I mean, people are still having babies.”

Scene Weaver’s product line of “home comforts” has also done well in a time when nesting is increasing once again.

“Home comforts’ still seem to do well during economic downturns,” he explained. “We’re in that niche as well. People are spending more time at home, and they still like to have home comforts. We hit that niche with our throws, pillows and bath wraps.”

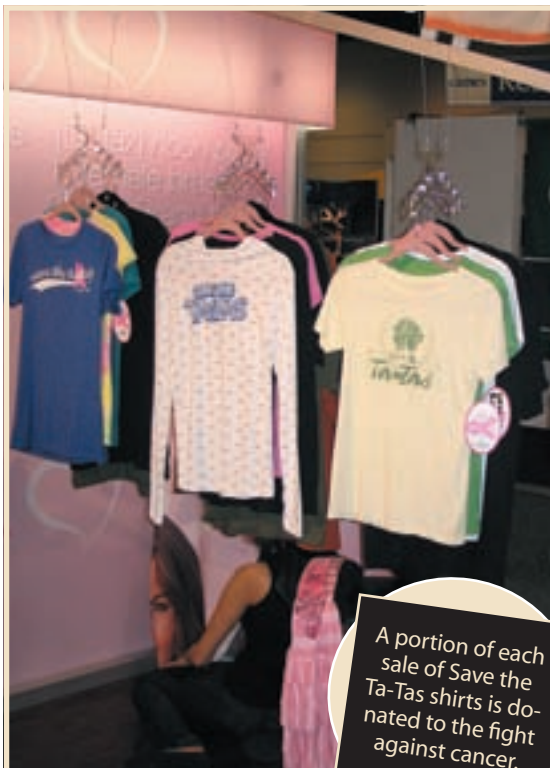
All told, Sapp said the company hoped to have a successful CAMEX. “We hope that our product is well received and that the buyers have interest in our product categories ... . Great sales would be the ultimate exclamation point on that.”

### VIVE LA FETE

Attending its second CAMEX, Vive La Fete (“Live the Party” in English), headed by Kristen Blankenbecler, is featuring children’s and ‘tweenage’ clothing to try to fill a niche that she believes is an open one.

“I’m a mom, I have a six year old and a four year old, and I know there is not a lot of high-end clothing that they can wear to church and school, so there is a market that I thought needed to be filled.”

The company’s embroidery and pink smock lines were



A portion of each sale of Save the Ta-Tas shirts is donated to the fight against cancer.



Scene Weaver featured its product line of “home comforts” in its CAMEX debut.



Vive La Fete hoped to interest college stores in its line of children's and 'tweenage' clothing.

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showcased during CAMEX. “We try to bring an array of items and bring extra items for every school we have so that we don’t miss a single school that we have,” Blankenbecler said. “This is our best opportunity to reach the largest number of schools out there.”

The company was looking to interest “a lot of new stores” in its products, “open up some new stores for us,” she said. “Leads are important to us. We want to meet and greet potential customers, and we’re hoping that when the economy turns around fully, it will give us more of a foundation in this market.”

### LITTLE KING MANUFACTURING

“I think if you’re going to be in the license business, this is the show to be showing at,” said David Bacon, manufacturers’ representative for Little King Manufacturing, about CAMEX. “It is the main show, it is the show that people look to see new companies, new trends in our industry and where all your major retailers and bookstores are coming to. If you are going to be in the industry, you’d better be here.”

Little King’s main thrust at the show was directed at new appliqué fleece, several new items for younger girls, such as dresses and thermal hoods, and a new polo collection for infants, toddlers and youths.

“We feel that we will get several new customers at the show, because this is where people coming into the industry, or have already been in the industry, are looking for new companies to pick up and carry in their stores,” Bacon said. “We feel that the infant, toddler and youth business is gaining and increasing in the collegiate business, and being that we are an importer and a domestic manufacturer, we have many things that we can offer the bookstore, as well as the major retailers.”

Bacon said the economy has made business more difficult, “but I think in our industry,



Little King Manufacturing displayed new appliqué fleece and new items for younger girls.

where we’re selling to the college fan, he may not buy as much as he did last year, but he is going to buy a new item with his college logo on it. He’ll stay faithful to his school.”

### GLOBAL DESIGN CONCEPTS

One of the many first-time CAMEX exhibitors was Global Design Concepts, representing the Skechers line in a new venture for the company.

“It’s the first launch of their backpacks,” said Howard Drucker, vice president of sales, ladies division for Global Design Concepts,

adding that the company also represents Bongo, a jean brand that it represents in its line of handbags and backpacks.

Since this is an entirely new venture for the company, Drucker said the company was testing the college market with both the Skechers and Bongo lines.

“It’s the first time we’ve ever done it,” he said. We don’t know the importance of being here yet. Hopefully, people will think the way we do. Really, we just hope to be able to gain as many college bookstore accounts as we can, because it’s something that we’ve never sold.”

Global Design Concepts is not totally new to the college market, as it partners with Barnes & Noble on other unspecified products. But for backpacks, this is new territory for the company.

“We basically sell to all the major department stores and chains, but this is the first time we’re trying this,” Drucker said. “We sell from Wal-Mart all the way up to Nordstrom, but we’ve never sold to individual people like this. Skechers would be a brand that for that age group, for those in college, in the bookstores, is something that we’re trying.”

### KORUS CO.

Korus Co. Inc., is a San Jose, Calif.-based manufacturer of Western Pack, which specializes in travel goods including backpacks, briefcases, luggage and other multi-purpose travel bags. The company featured these items at CAMEX.

“CAMEX is one of the most significant shows that we attend to reach out to schools,” said John Lim, vice president, operations. “A good portion of our business is done with schools and students. We take CAMEX very seriously, and always look forward to expanding and growing our business in the industry.”

Lim said the company sees opportunity in every show that it attends. “It’s the opportunity to reach out to buyers, students and faculties to provide them with various lines of products,” he said.

At CAMEX, Lim said the company highlighted its new, wide-body carry-on. “Most luggage needs to be turned sideways to fit in the overhead bin,” he explained. “This luggage fits perfectly on the upper overhead bin on most airplanes without having to turn the luggage sideways.”

The wide body provides just as much space as most expandable luggage, and Lim said the wide-body carry-on has shoe pockets inside for travelers who always look for ways to fit their extra pair of shoes in a carry-on.

The product is available in two colors: black and olive.

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