

THREADS *of* COMPASSION:

How WearWell Puts People First Amid Labour Barriers

Presented by the Pictou County Chamber of Commerce



Image: President & Co-Founder Stirling MacLean with Chamber Executive Director Layla Rahmeh on the floor at the WearWell Garments production facility in Stellarton, NS.

Driving past the WearWell Garments factory in Stellarton, the scope of the facility is not immediately obvious from the outside. Once you enter the facility however, you are immersed in a world of highly organized, efficient, and impressive manufacturing on a mass scale. This level of organization stems from more than 40 years developing a business which has become a cornerstone of Canadian manufacturing. Originally founded in 1978 by Fraser MacLean, the family owned and operated business has earned a national reputation for durable, high-quality workwear that is designed, produced, and inspected with meticulous care and Canadian pride. The current President, Co-Founder and son of Fraser, Stirling MacLean, has worked over recent years to evolve the business, purchasing state of the art manufacturing equipment to stay ahead of the curve in modern manufacturing and distribution on a global scale. Under the continued care of the MacLean family, WearWell Garments has grown immensely while maintaining its core values of quality, community, and ethical management.

The core commitments of WearWell are to provide customers with durable, long-lasting uniforms, to manufacture ethically made clothing while providing a fair living wage to employees, and to support their local community - helping Pictou County Flourish. Their dedication to ethical and fair management is evident in not only the quality of their garments, but in the way their staff are represented. This is because their commitment to quality and ethical manufacturing doesn't begin with materials or production processes, it starts with the dedication they have towards their employees.

With humble beginnings as a family run business, the culture of treating staff as family remained while WearWell has grown and expanded. At WearWell they believe that employees are a testament to the true loyalty of their business.

While Chamber representatives, President Lydia Sayeau and Executive Director Layla Rahmeh, toured the production floor, the values of WearWell were evident. Staff were welcoming, engaged, and proud to share what they do - which reinforced the sense that WearWell is more than an ethical employer, they are a company that truly cares about its people. Chamber President Lydia Sayeau noted that "It was incredibly impressive to see the scale of what WearWell Garments is producing right here in Pictou County" and that the tour gave "a much deeper appreciation for the volume of work, the investment they've made in their facility, and the pride their team takes in what they do". The visit was an important opportunity to listen, learn and better understand both WearWell's success and the challenges they are currently navigating.

One of the key issues raised by Stirling during the tour was the ongoing need for more sewers in their fast paced and growing operation. WearWell has always aimed to make their work environment accessible by offering on the job training, meaning those with no prior experience are able to gain the skills they need to be successful in the factory environment. Even with this practice in place however, they still experience a labour shortage which means that they rely

on being able to support the integration of people into the community to provide the level of service they pride themselves on. The company is currently facing challenges related to work permits for employees which are already in immigration streams, such as the Atlantic Immigration Program and the Nova Scotia Immigration Program. These challenges have made it difficult for the company to uphold their commitments to staff and new community members. The Chamber takes these concerns very seriously and is actively looking into methods of support for WearWell, such as advocacy through letters of support to representatives and officials.

WearWell is an active and generous community partner, contributing tens of thousands of dollars to organizations such as the IWK children's Hospital, Big Brothers Big Sisters, the United Way of Pictou County, and the Pictou County Wellness Centre. They also sponsor the WearWell Bombers U15 Major Hockey Team which are currently celebrating their 10th year, expressing great pride in the development of young players within their community. WearWell's dedication to community stretches beyond community organizations, with a deep devotion to environmental responsibility. At WearWell, they divert more than 1 million pounds of scrap fabric from landfills by repurposing materials while continually advancing towards their goal of becoming a zero-waste facility. These efforts earned them the 2014 Small Business of the Year Award from Divert NS and highlight their positive impact on Pictou County.

The Pictou County Chamber of Commerce believes that it is critical to stay connected with local businesses, celebrate the incredible work that is happening in Pictou County, and ensure that the Chamber continues to be a supportive voice for employers like WearWell Garments as they grow and navigate current challenges. The Chamber wants to thank Stirling, Co-Founder & President, for walking representatives Lydia and Layla through the full operation, and for sharing their incredible work, as well as voicing the company's current challenges.

“WearWell is a strong example of an innovative, community-minded employer, and as a Chamber, we want businesses like theirs to know we are here to listen, understand their challenges, and support them where we can”

— Lydia Sayeau, Chamber President

WearWell
GARMENTS LTD.



Image: 2004-2005 Business of the year award presented to WearWell Garments by the Pictou County Chamber of Commerce displayed at the production facility in Stellarton, NS.