

# Maine Woolens

... a looming success

BY PATRICK GABRION  
Times Record Business Editor

## BRUNSWICK

**P**aul Street in Brunswick is one of those "don't blink or you are going to miss it" kind of places. But while it may be off the beaten path — and thus hard to find — there is a business located along the road that's emitting plenty of positive vibes and excitement.

It's at the Maine Woolens mill ... at 15 Paul St.

Jo Miller's company is expanding, both in the size of its facilities and

the number of customers it serves.

"We are excited about our position in the industry," said Miller, who started Maine Woolens about four years ago. "Our client base is growing daily as they see the capabilities we offer: quality, design, service, delivery."

The Times Record recently visited the mill to talk with Miller and Ray Boshold, vice president of sales, to learn about their skilled work force, why they find themselves growing while others are cutting back, and how it makes a difference to offer products carrying a "Made in Maine" label.

**Q. First of all, provide us with the history of Maine Woolens.**

A. Jo Miller started Maine Woolens about four years ago shortly after her late husband, Herb Miller, closed Miller Industries, a spinning and weaving mill in Lisbon Falls.

Having textiles in her blood, Jo was not ready to retire so she started MW and brought back a number of key employees to work with her.

Jo's goal was to have a group of skilled Maine workers producing the highest quality blankets and throws in the industry. It took a while to get the mill up and running, but today we are producing the best products in the market.

**Q. What types of products do you offer?**

A. At Maine Woolens, we weave blankets and throws made of the best natural fibers available, cottons and wools. They are soft, luxurious and easy to care for, and, for the most part, machine washable and tumble dry.

**Q. Is everything manufacturing-wise undertaken right here in Brunswick?**



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**JO MILLER** started Maine Woolens about four years ago shortly after her late husband, Herb Miller, closed Miller Industries, a spinning and weaving mill in Lisbon Falls.

A. At our mill in Brunswick, we start with the raw materials, yarns in cotton and washable wool, and go through the whole process of creeling, beaming, weaving, dyeing, finishing, packaging and shipping.

**Q. Please explain for us your manufacturing process? Where do your raw materials come from?**

A. We weave a variety of styles that involve patterns, texture and color. This begins right at the creel where one of our talented employees starts the process of laying out yarns for our looms.

Then we have pattern cards on our looms that determine the texture and/or design of the fabric. Once woven, we can put color on the fabric via our capabilities to piece dye solid colors. If we have fabrics that are patterned like plaids or stripes, the process was started by the lay out of colors in the initial step of creeling.

The majority of our raw materials are 100 percent U.S. sourced. All of our wools come from domestically raised sheep. Their fleece is sheared and sent to U.S. mills to be spun into yarns. In this process the wool is treated so that the final product, our blankets, can be machine washed and tumble dried for ease of care.

Where we can, we purchase U.S.-grown cotton yarns. Otherwise we purchase our yarns offshore. To show the state of textiles in the U.S., cottons growers, per the USDA, produced 15.6 million bales of fiber last year and exported 95 percent. Today, there isn't an integrated mill in the U.S. that can provide us with all of our requirements for cotton yarns.

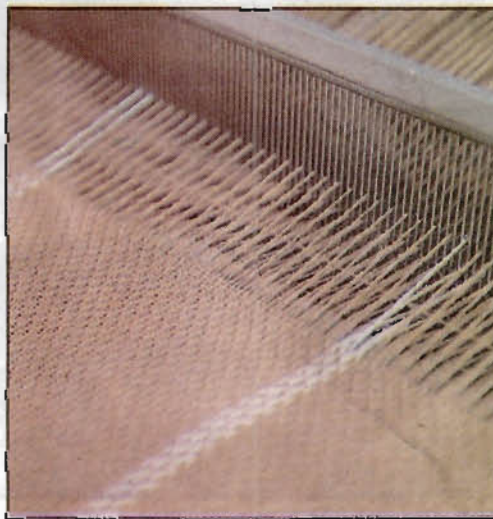
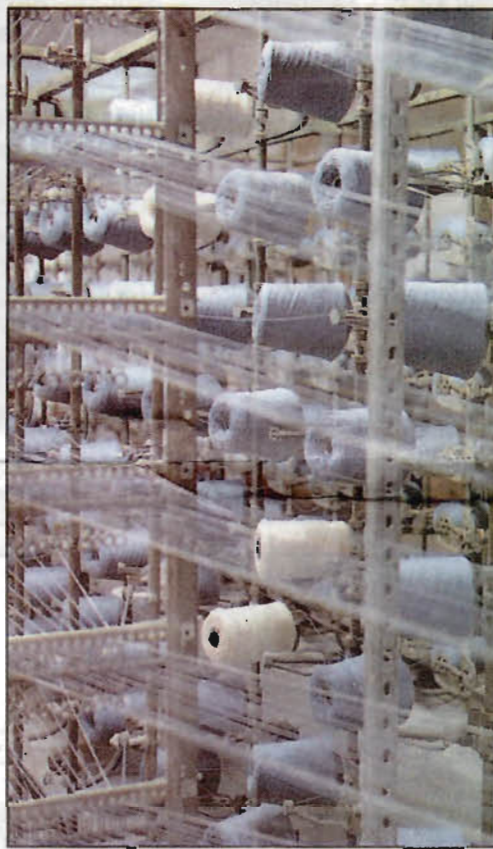
**Q. You are in the midst of an expansion project. What's going on over at Paul Street?**

A. We are adding warehousing, manufacturing and shipping space right now and expect to be completed by Dec. 1.

Part of this expansion will allow us to buy 100 percent U.S.-grown cotton yarns and twist them ourselves, to give us the basic raw material needed to produce our fabrics.

Going forward, we will be able to

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# WOOLENS

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say that all of our goods are 100 percent "Made in the USA" and "Made in Maine."

**Q. While many in your industry are reducing their operations, Maine Woolens is growing. How do you explain this occurrence?**

A. There is a strong desire by the American public to buy quality, affordable products that are "Made in the USA" and "Made in Maine."

Americans want to know that the products they buy support the American economy and in turn employ American workers. We think we are at the forefront of this strong surge to buy American.

**Q. In visiting your business, one picks up real positive vibes and excitement. Your comments, please.**

A. We are excited about our position in the industry. We are an industrial weaver. We weave on industrial grade looms capable of weaving widths from throw through king sizes, in volume and high quality. There are artisan weavers with the same capabilities, doing so on variations of hand looms that are slower.

Our client base is growing daily as they see the capabilities we offer: quality, design, service, delivery.

**Q. How many people do you employ? Tell us about your staff, their longevity with the company and their skills.**

A. We have about 17 employees, having recently added two people.

The majority of our employees came with Jo at the startup of Maine Woolens. These are talented Mainers who bring, on average, a minimum of 25 years of experience in textiles. We have people that creel and set up the looms, weavers, fixers, cutters, sewers, dyers, all with tons of experience.



LINN CAROLEO / THE TIMES RECORD

**MAINE WOOLENS**, located on Paul Street in Brunswick, is adding warehousing, manufacturing and shipping space. The expansion project is expected to be completed by Dec. 1.

***"We have a client that showed us a picture of a blanket. A week later, during a plant tour by about 15 of their employees, we gave them a prototype of the blanket. Shocked that we did it so quickly? Yes. They cannot get this level of service from their offshore suppliers. That type of response led to a comment like 'We're going to keep you busy.'"***

The nice part of this is that they are family to us and not just employees. Jo Miller thinks the world of our people, providing a good job, good wages and benefits, a safe work environment, and they in turn reciprocate by being terrific workers who want to, and do, make high-quality products.

The pride they take in what

they do takes Maine Woolens to the next level.

**Q. How significant do you think it is that your goods say "Made in Maine?" Do you believe that makes a difference with your customers?**

A. We think "Made in Maine" denotes quality. Mainers take pride in their work.

They work hard to produce the best products in the market.

The "Made in Maine" label along with "Made in the USA" is a strong selling point for our customers. Our products are crafted with pride.

**Q. Can you offer any testimonials from satisfied customers?**

A. We have clients that require very stringent quality standards. They come in to evaluate us for work place safety, confirm that we treat our employees well while providing a livable wage and benefits, maintaining proper records, fully documenting and reporting to all of the local, state and federal departments that regulate our industry.

We also think we provide our clients with something others take lightly. That is service.

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employees, we gave them a prototype of the blanket. Shocked that we did it so quickly? Yes.

They cannot get this level of service from their offshore suppliers. That type of response led to a comment like "We're going to keep you busy."

**Q. Do you have a retail location? Are your products available at other stores and online, or in catalogs?**

A. Our retail store is located right on Pleasant Street in Brunswick. All of our products are offered at the store as well as a variety of products made by other Maine businesses and other New England companies.

We sell over the Internet at [www.mainewoolens.com](http://www.mainewoolens.com) and our products are being carried in several national catalogs.

**Q. Your company has a bit of a low-key presence. Is this by design?**

A. Not by design. We just like going about our business

of producing high-quality blankets and throws and let that be our advertising.

**Q. What is your contact information?**

A. The Maine Woolens store on Pleasant Street can be reached at 798-7933, while manufacturing and wholesale operations on Paul Street can be reached at 725-7900.

**Q. Is there anything else you would like to add?**

A. Throughout our operations and particularly in our dye process we try to be environmentally responsible. We use low impact dyes, dye at lower temperatures and for shorter times, fully exhaust our dyes and make sure our effluent is clean, Ph neutral and tested.

We thank you for the opportunity to present ourselves to your readers, and we encourage them to buy "Made in Maine" and "Made in the USA," hopefully buying from Maine Woolens for their blanket and throw needs.