

Early in 2007, while checking a production run of Crews, our first and best-selling sock style, we noticed that they didn't have the 'pop' and crispness that our loyal customers had come to expect. We decided to find the old knitting machines that originally made our Maggie's Crews back in 1992. These single-feed machines, invented and built near a river in North Carolina, are almost extinct as they run slower than newer machines. We managed to locate a few machines, tested some pairs of socks, and were sold! Determined to bring back the original Maggie's Crew sock we all loved so dearly, we found a knitter able to use these machines and made the switch.



Of course this left us with a problem: what to do with the several thousand pairs of Crews already knit but just not up to our standards. Our staff had a meeting, and each of us brought creative ideas of what to do with these 'less than perfect' Crews. One of the ideas was to make the Crews into sock dolls - but who would make them?

Ever since 1999, when we helped a group of hurricane victims form a worker-owned sewing cooperative in Nicaragua (Maquiladora Mujeres), we had hoped to one day bring the idea home, where so many US apparel workers have lost their livelihood. In the summer of 2007 while presenting at a workshop in Asheville, NC, our president met the folks from SACCO (Southern Appalachian Center for Cooperative Ownership/ Ownership Appalachia), and they agreed to help us turn our dream of a domestic sewing cooperative into a reality.

SACCO made the connection with the workers, all from Morganton, NC, one of the many towns in the Southeast with boarded up apparel mills and talented workers. We took the thousands of pairs of Crews, partnered with SACCO and the motivated workers, and through many design incarnations, came up with Maggie's Sock Monkeys.

The Sock Monkeys are designed and made from those slightly irregular Crew socks. We use pre-consumer polyester mill scrap for the stuffing as it provides the smoothness and loft that our monkeys need and survives machine washing. It also comes from a plant in South Carolina saving both freight and fuel.

As for our supply of excess socks, our quality control folks are very picky, so we do end up with quite a few slightly irregular socks from various stages of production. These socks have slight flaws and can have a new life as part of a stuffed animal. As long as we keep making socks and apparel, we feel we can keep the cooperative stocked with raw materials.

Maggie's Sock Monkeys are the first of what we hope will be a Menagerie of stuffed animals all made from excess socks and apparel. This Menagerie collection has been newly expanded with the launch of the Penguin, designed from our irregular pants, baby bodysuits, and our wildly popular tie dye legwarmers.

The workers are the real story here. They are talented, committed, and are putting it all on the line every day for the chance to build their own business. There is much left to work out including vestment schedule, production timing, and many things, but right now we are all working very hard to make this project a success. They have aptly named their new business Opportunity Threads, and we are proud to be their partner.