

MEET NOTIONS SPONSOR: Jo-Ann Fabric and Craft Stores

Cheese and fabric may be an unlikely combination, but this is the duo that launched what we know today as Jo-Ann Fabric and Craft Stores.

In 1943, the Reich family was running a cheese and fancy food business. The Rohrbach family approached them about also selling fabric in the space. The result was the “Cleveland Fabric Shop,” a single store that sold cheese and fabric. Soon, however, the fabric portion took over. When Berthold Rohrbach died that same year, his daughter, Alma Zimmerman, went to work full-time at the store with Hilda Reich. Hilda’s daughter, Betty, joined the family business in 1947, and she and Alma opened the chain’s second store in Cleveland soon after.



Betty married Martin Rosskamm in 1948, and he quit his upper-level management position at a knitting mill to join the fabric company. He became the driving force behind the chain’s continuous expansion throughout the Midwest. His son, Alan Rosskamm, succeeded him to serve as chairman of the board, president, and CEO of Jo-Ann Stores, Inc. and currently serves on the Board of Directors. And both Betty Rosskamm and Alma Zimmerman served as directors for more than 35 years.

By 1963, there were 18 Cleveland Fabric Shops in Ohio. To broaden appeal outside the state, the families created the Jo-Ann name by merging two of their children’s names—Jo from Joan Zimmerman and Ann from Jackie Ann Rosskamm. They kept that

name until the end of the decade, when the company was renamed Fabri-Centers of America.

The Fabri-Centers small specialty stores, often located in the regional shopping malls that sprung up in the postwar era, competed well with the fabric departments of larger general merchandise stores.

In the late 1970s, Fabri-Centers took up the slack created by the demise of fabric and notions departments in both department stores and mass merchandisers. By 1983, Fabri-Centers boasted over 600 stores under the Jo-Ann, Showcase of Fine Fabrics, and House of Fine Fabrics names in 33 states. But when the economy went sour in the mid-1980s, apparel manufacturers slashed their prices and the money-saving motivation to sew took a real blow. Fabric stores in general fell on hard times and difficult years of declining sales and over-expansion followed for everyone. Some chains, like House of Fabrics and Piece Goods Shops, were mired in bankruptcy, and many of the other former leaders were either bought out or liquidated. By the mid-1990s, only Fabri-Centers and Hancock Fabrics were left standing. Some fundamental changes that had already been instituted as part of a turnaround program of the late 1980s would be the factors that kept Fabri-Centers at the top of the fabric game. Efficiency efforts included construction of a new distribution center and creation of a state-of-the-art computer system that linked operations from the point of sale to the warehouse. In 1994, Fabri-Centers purchased Cloth World’s 343 stores; in 1998, they purchased 250 House of Fabrics stores. In 1997, Joann.com was launched and in 1998, the company changed its name to Jo-Ann Stores, Inc.



Headquartered in Hudson, Ohio, today Jo-Ann Fabric & Craft Stores has approximately 750 locations in 47 states. The stores are a mix of fabrics and sewing supplies, crafting components, home and seasonal décor, and custom framing. They have developed celebrity partnerships with the likes of designer Christopher Lowell, designer Debbie Mumm, and actress/model Christie Brinkley.

They’ve launched “Own Your Look, Own Your Future,” a contest that encourages teens to make their own prom outfit—including a garment and an accessory—for an opportunity to win \$50,000 cash for college or one of nine other cash prizes.



And they’ve been loyal boosters of ASG, as a *Notions* sponsor, with an on-going discount to ASG members, and by supporting many of our chapters on the local level.