

Jk3 Softwear

Cold Weather Clothing with a Warm Heart



Kim Smith

BY BENJAMIN BUTLER

Since May of 2010, a retail store at 409 Broad Street has been producing an unmistakably local product. Jk3 Softwear, owned and operated by West Texas native Kim Smith, creates custom designed outdoor clothing with a focus on utilizing recycled materials. Smith explains that “Jk” means “Just Kimberly,” and “3” was added because Jk3 is the child store of J2 Softwear in Salida, Co.



Kim Smith's Market Street storefront

After graduating from University of North Texas with a major in fine arts and a concentration in metal work and jewelry making, Smith worked as an artist for several years. Four years ago, Smith moved to Chattanooga with plans to open a swimsuit business. However, she quickly moved towards the custom garment industry—a trade made familiar to her at an early age by her Mormon family—when she acquired an inventory of recycled fabrics from a local manufacturer. Soon, Smith began employing local seamstresses whose jobs had been outsourced to foreign markets, and she established a strong business model rooted in quality craftsmanship.

Describing the endless possibilities for custom-made garments, Smith says, “If you can think it up, we can make it.” From pockets for cell phones to unique bedding for four-legged friends, Jk3 Softwear is able to actualize the dreams of customers onsite. Some of Smith’s own ideas include items for athletes that will contribute to a peak performance as well as items with logos from local schools and businesses. However, the most common requests from Smith’s customers are for jackets, vests, hats and other outdoor clothing.

Beyond her own designs, Smith provides local artists with a co-op where they can sell their products, and she collaborates with other businesses in order to assure that Jk3’s products remain local. Smith also assists the Chattanooga community through charitable contributions. One of these contributions is her emerging non-profit organization, Coat of Many Colors, which plans to provide



warm clothing and sleeping bags for the homeless in Chattanooga during the winter months. Another is the production of dog beds from recycled fabric for a local animal shelter.

Last March, Smith purchased Chilli Heads, a well-known local hat brand made and designed on Signal Mountain. With the assets from Chilli Heads, Smith has started her own manufacturing company—Wet & Woolly Warehouse—directly next to Jk3. While Jk3 focuses on the retail aspects of Smith’s business model, Wet & Woolly is helping her develop her own unique brand as the manufacturing and design development branch of the business. Smith says that the brand awareness of Chilli Heads created a special opportunity for a business starting out in a competitive industry. While she is building Jk3 Softwear’s brand locally, she hopes Wet & Woolly will help her expand her production to supply a national market.

Beyond her professional aspirations, Smith would like to involve herself more actively in local politics and continue to pursue various passions such as paddle boarding and running. Most importantly, she wants to continue providing her two children with a solid base from which to start their lives.

“My boys and I love living, working and playing on Broad. We’ve planted our seeds here. The fruits of our labor have been good and the ‘wearhouse’ is full, so I’m compelled to help the homeless, be a good neighbor, and maximize my talents to keep Chattanooga warm this winter!” she says with gusto. **CS**