

Moved to Create

Mandeville mom Cara Joseph is finding success in the competitive athleisure clothing market.

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PHOTOS BY SARA ESSEX BRADLEY

BRAND-NEW NOLA-INSPIRED ACTIVEWEAR company MoveMe is taking on fitness fashion with a line of clothing as colorful as the city that inspires it. Launched in August of 2018, MoveMe has hit the ground running. The company created 850 items for its first collection and has sold more than half in its first four months.

For owner and creator Cara Joseph, a Mandeville native, MoveMe's mission is to perfect clothing performance and product in a field that is full of competition, while fulfilling her passion of combining fashion and business.

While there are hundreds of activewear companies on the market, Joseph said she wasn't worried about there being room for one more brand. Joseph attended LSU where she studied costume design, and carried her passion for the craft, as well as her personal love of fitness, beyond her school years. Additionally, Joseph worked in sales and marketing positions at Aramark and a private business banking software before becoming a stay-at-home mom to her four children.

"I simply wanted to do something that I was passionate about; something that would fulfill my love of design, fitness, sales and business," she said. "The urge to start was so strong for me that I walked into a friend's party, left 10 minutes later and started to design. I then walked into my first trade show two months later. I was determined to make contacts and began research on how to accomplish my idea.



MoveMe's Core Collection features nine versatile pieces ranging in sizes from XS to L, with a color palette inspired by shades of New Orleans architecture. Each piece is specially designed to be comfortable and quick dry to suit extreme humidity and a warmer tropical climate.

DEFINITION

Merriam-Webster defines athleisure as "casual clothing — like yoga pants, sweat pants, and hoodies — that are designed to be worn both for exercising and for doing (almost) everything else."



MoveMe is part of a growing trend both nationally and globally, with more and more mainstream clothing and accessory brands, such as Coach, the Gap and shoe designer Steve Madden developing fitness wear lines. According to an April 2018 report by the NPD Group, activewear currently makes up 24 percent of all clothing sales, with forecasts of even more growth projected for 2019.

Designed by Joseph and headquartered in Mandeville, MoveMe fashions are locally inspired and are 100 percent made in the

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United States, a goal that was particularly important to Joseph.

“I researched U.S. manufacturers and was determined to find the best,” she said. “Again, persistence paid off as I had to bug them to work with me. Production began immediately, then I started receiving product samples, and lastly photos.”

Joseph says the fact that all of her products are made domestically sets her company apart. The pieces are made by a small team of seamstresses located in the Northeast with fabrics that are shipped from Taiwan.

“I have met the women who sew each piece,” she said. “I have stood over their shoulders and watched them sew. My headquarters are in my hometown of Mandeville, Louisiana, in between my storage unit, my car and my home. It’s not glamorous. Trust me. I spend a lot of time in a quiet storage unit; counting, separating, wrapping and packing my products.”

Currently MoveMe is a solo effort by Joseph, although she is hopeful that with the line’s promising sales, she will be able to expand.

“What I’ve learned is there are no rules in active wear apparel,” Joseph said. “Next, I am making three new pieces; a new legging with a pocket, a loose tank, a sleeveless duster, and re-making a few pieces from The Core Collection.”

Customer feedback and an all-inclusive approach to her target buyers contribute to Joseph’s designs. MoveMe’s Core Collection is currently available online, with plans for new additions throughout the spring and summer, but Joseph has seen tremendous value out of getting into the community to sell her wares as well.

“Since launching, I have attended pop-ups or festivals weekly to sell my pieces,” she said. “This has been great for me to talk to my audience about what they want and receive valuable customer feedback. [My target audience is] any woman. All shapes and sizes. I have younger customers mostly buying crops [tops] and I also have older women purchasing the leggings and long sleeves for travel and swim.”

Currently featuring nine different pieces available in the Core Collection, available in sizes extra small to large, MoveMe is designed to fit and flatter while keeping wearers cool.





MoveMe's Core Collection will get a boost in 2019, with several new pieces, including leggings with a pockets and a loose-fit tank, are already in the works.

"For my first collection, I wanted to fit most body types, but I also wanted a sexy line of activewear," Joseph said. "I think a high neckline and a high-waist legging is flattering on all women. I was also inspired by the climate of our state... I chose a lightweight fabric with UPF and quick-dry, wicking technology to be able to be worn all day. I also wanted this line to have an athleisure vibe. I was going for a true gym-to-street collection."

Inspired by New Orleans' unique architecture and style, Joseph said MoveMe provides a refreshing fashion alternative.

"New Orleans is a colorful city. When you walk through most residential areas, every home has a vibrant color block," she said. "I wanted to start with a lot of color, not just black. I wanted my brand to loudly say, 'Hey I'm here and I'm big, bold and sexy, and your new favorite brand, created out of this awesome city!' Its buttery softness and cool, naked sensation are perfect to wear in this warm, humid climate."

While Joseph acknowledges the overwhelming popularity and presence of active wear, for her, MoveMe is a personal business venture that she hopes will inspire others, especially her own family.

"There are hundreds of yoga leggings out there," she said. "All of them contain spandex, all of them worn day to night, in multiple colors, fitting all shapes and sizes," she said. "To me, it's the perfect clothing piece. MoveMe is different because it is started by a mom whose primary goal is to inspire her children throughout this business. I want my daughters and son to learn by example through me just as I did through my father."

Joseph has always been inspired by by-the-bootstraps success of her father, Jim Bennett, a south Louisiana real estate developer and owner of a local athletic club with more than 8,000 members.

Persistence, work ethic and networking are just some of the ways that Joseph cites her success.

"I was raised by an entrepreneur and absorbed the ins and outs of small business at a young age. My dad and my uncles started their businesses from nothing. It was the best education I could have asked for," she said. My passions are in fashion and fitness. I have discovered that this career is everything I have always loved, married into one. This business is

a combination of fitness, fashion, design, sales, marketing all in one. Everything I love, and a combination of all my previous experiences."

By developing an extended group of fellow business owners and sharing information and experiences, MoveMe has moved beyond a living room idea to a reality, according to Joseph.

"I have always been a people person and enjoy the hustle of sales, and the fulfillment of day-to-day business," she said. "I never sit still, I am always on the go and every spare moment I have is committed to educating myself to better my brand. I hardly say 'no'

to an event or function where I feel that I can learn something or meet someone new in any business, not just fashion or fitness. A reward for me is when I also help out, inspire, or give advice to another small business owners. I have made a lot of inspirational friends in this business in the past two years, who I am forever grateful for." ■

MOVEME

For more information, visit MoveMe.fit.

STYLE SUCCESS TRENDSETTER. COM'S TOP 11 ACTIVEWEAR BRANDS TO WATCH IN 2019

1. Lululemon
2. FP Movement by Free People
3. Fabletics
4. Adidas by Stella McCartney
5. Vie Active
6. Pins to Kill
7. Sweaty Betty
8. Huntr
9. Outdoor Voices
10. Olympia Activewear
11. Live the Process