

Protecting Our Protectors



Photo by David Gibb | dgibbphoto.com

Having inflammable clothing makes a difference, and for those that face fiery threats every day, every item of clothing could be the difference between life and death. Since 1999, the Southern Oregon-based apparel company, Massif, has been working to provide comfortable and effective flame-resistant clothing for those in the literal line of fire.

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Founded by Randy Benham and Jeff Roberts, Massif began as a garage operation, and the company has grown by word of mouth. Massif creates flame-resistant clothing that is flexible and light-weight for whether adventuring in adverse weather conditions or working in a hazardous environment.

Massif's headquarters have always been in Southern Oregon where people understand the need for outdoor clothing and where there are opportunities for significant field-testing for their products—and they have no plans to leave.

"While going to SOU here, I fell in love with the area. People understand the need for outdoor clothing. There are also opportunities for significant field-testing of our products. And it's just a nice lifestyle."

-Noelle Christensen
President

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You can't always stop, drop, and roll when your clothes catch on fire. And even if you can, some situations are too severe for the flames to disappear instantly. Having inflammable clothing makes a difference, and for those that face fiery threats every day, every item of clothing could be the difference between life and death. Since 1999, the Southern Oregon-based apparel company, Massif, has been working to provide comfortable and effective flame-resistant clothing for those in the literal line of fire.

Founded by Randy Benham and Jeff Roberts, Massif began as a garage operation, growing by word of mouth. After serving as a Search and Rescue crew member in Grand Teton National Park, Benham understood the need for protective clothes, and Roberts had the business acumen to help start the company.

With flame-resistant clothing that was flexible and light-weight, difficult tasks became easier—and safer. Whether adventuring in adverse weather conditions or working in a hazardous environment, Massif makes sure their materials will serve the wearer well. Unlike regular clothing, Massif's innovative material doesn't support combustion, "creating a thermal barrier between the flame and the skin."

For the first several years the company was small and buffeted by change. At one point Roberts' mother even bought the company in order to keep it from collapsing. But the future was brighter than any of them were expecting. In 2006, Massif received a game-changing contract: they were to make clothing for the United States Military. "I think it's a testament to us that we're still doing that," Noelle Christensen, the company's president says. "We're still satisfying them after all these years."

Satisfying—and protecting. Massif has seen numerous stories like those of SFC Sarah Walker, who was in a suicide bombing in Afghanistan. She was protected from serious burn injury because of her flame-resistant clothing. CW4 Skip Tackett also attributes his Massif gear to saving his life during a helicopter fire.

In 2014, Massif was bought by Antex/Matchmaster, the company's textile mill based in Los Angeles. Family-run and woman-owned, the mill has a forty-year history of manufacturing clothing from start-to-finish in the United States. Though the mill is in California, Massif's headquarters have always been in Southern Oregon—and they have no plans to leave. "While going to SOU here, I fell in love with the area," says Noelle. "People understand the need for outdoor clothing. There are also opportunities for significant field-testing of our products. And it's just a nice lifestyle."

Massif is also proud to support the National Industries for the Blind by offering sewing positions at their textile factory to visually challenged and impaired individuals. With a little extra effort, even a completely blind worker can create quality clothing that might someday save someone's life.

Not all employees at an apparel company are required to be expert sewers. In fact, a good portion of the design takes place on computer programs, requiring some employees to possess a level of tech-savviness. Of the forty-two employees, around half have business degrees or garment-design education, but the other half are trained on the job. Often, temporary employees become permanent. Coming in as a one-time model for fitting can sometimes lead to becoming a regular face around the company.

As with other small businesses, everyone has to help in multiple areas; versatility is a must. Noelle added that in addition to hard-working employees, Massif hires employees who care about the underlying mission: to supply "the United States Military and those working in the world's most challenging environments" with protective clothing—to help keep our defenders safe while they're on the frontlines.



Massif makes flame-resistant clothing that is flexible and light-weight

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