

Jūpmode fuses art and industry to create wearable success

John Amato may credit a number of people for leading him to his current position as a business owner — people including his father, his older brother and the famed OSU Coach Jim Tressel — but the success of the full-service screen printing and retail brand Jūpmode is an accolade he had to win for himself.

Start with the company name. It came out of his father's insistence on early entrepreneurship, and his brother's subsequent childhood lawn-mowing service (Jupiter Pro Lawn Care) — plus John's college internship in Paris, home of *la mode* (the fashion). Jūpmode.

And Jim Tressel? Well, any T-shirt glorifying that particular Buckeye is bound to do well in Ohio, where it was the company's first big success.

But not the last, as the uniformly positive customer reviews that fill the company's online presence will attest. Success wasn't an overnight affair, John says: "It took a long time to get where we are, even to be a sustainable business that could employ people besides myself."

Jūpmode really took off, he says, when John began screen-printing on his own. That too had a steep learning curve. "I bought used equipment, found a mostly-unused studio in Perrysburg and started teaching myself how to screen print, do artwork and everything that comes with custom decoration." It was a trial-and-error process, he admits, with online tutorials and his own observations of other companies.

"Things eventually snowballed. I started doing shirts for family reunions, for cross-country teams and what have you." The company landed some solid accounts — St. Ursula Academy, the Toledo Sport and Social Club, St. John's Jesuit High School among them — who are with the company still.

"We're good at keeping customers," John says with understandable pride.

The company's popular vintage and region-specific fashions began early on as well. "I was doing standard graphic T-shirts for the University of Toledo, OSU, U of M and BGSU. As I was thinking about what the next logical step should be, I hit on connecting those schools — especially UT — to something specifically about Toledo. A friend recommended 'You Will Do Better in Toledo.' That one really struck a vein of pride. Now our 'Midwestern' shirt has become the most popular one in 2020, and helped us to branch out to beyond Toledo."

John doesn't want to branch out so far, though, that he forgets the local. Two Jūpmode programs have highlighted the company's commitment in that direction. Here for Good sold \$20 shirts online with the names or logos of local organizations, schools or businesses; \$10 of each sale went directly back to those entities. With 500 participants, Jūpmode raised \$135,000. "We really saw the community's commitment to local places," John notes.

The second program, Community Shirt Club, is now in its second full year. "It started off with a shirt for the Toledo Christmas Weed," John says, recalling the curbside plant that the city took to its heart with decorations and gifts. "One reason it sold so well was because we were donating proceeds to local shelters. We subsequently created a program where every other month we were donating a shirt for a good local cause. It's good PR for them and makes them some money. You can buy it as a one-off or sign up for shirt club, with a discount. It's been fun."

Headquartered in Toledo's Uptown, John reflects, "I think I love all the things everybody loves about Toledo. The one that speaks to me as a businessperson, though, is how Jūpmode is both industrial and creative. To me that's very Toledo. It goes back to the city's glass history, which has both industrial glass and art glass. We are using automated processes to make shirts, but it's still an art form. I hope we're keeping the city's dual history alive, and I love being part of both communities: artistic and business."

John's equally enthusiastic about the Family Business Center, particularly its affinity groups. "There's nothing like it, being able to talk in confidence with others, hear about their successes and challenges — just learning. I was really fortunate to find the Family Business Center, and I recommend it to anybody."

The future, he feels, is full of potential. "We're not a small shop, not a big shop," he says. "We're kind of in the middle, which is not always the best place to be. I'm looking to make the next step upward. We have the team and we have the determination."

Now there's a slogan for a T-shirt.