

Lifestyle Apparel, Athleisure, Invigorate Sales

As a new generation brings its influence to bear on fashion and function, casual, “lifestyle” and “athleisure” styles continue to grow in importance among the designs and merchandise sold on Army & Air Force Exchange Service’s (AAFES) Softlines pads.

“There is definitely a growing trend in athleisure to include lifestyle apparel from all the major brands,” noted Kim Luce, the Exchange buyer responsible for men’s athletic apparel.

“Athleisure is a fashion trend designed for workouts or athletic activities which can be worn in other settings, workplace, school, or social occasions,” he explained. “This category has grown with the influx of a more casual attitude with customers. The rise of health and fitness trends for all ages has contributed to this lifestyle trend.”

‘GOOD FIT’

Lifestyle apparel garments have recently tended to favor a common set of colors and functionality.

“New technology has led to materials which are developed for moisture (wicking), odor reduction, increased ‘stretchability’ to conform to the body’s shape, and are breathable,” Luce said. “The goal is to keep skin cool and dry as possible and this technology is used in T-shirts, running apparel,

workout apparel, and polo shirts.

“Color variations include greens, royal blue, orange, reds, all of which have been introduced in a variety of tees, hoodies, pants and shorts.”

Custom apparel is also an active area. Luce said, “Custom apparel that ties itself to a category such as Army, Air Force or a specific sport logo is having nice increases in business.”

Luce said that athleisure and lifestyle apparel are trends that “should continue to be a good fit for the Exchange, as we have a broad audience that will continue to cross over between workout, fitness, and the growing athleisure wear.”

BRAND POWER

As far as specific brands are concerned that are feeding into these and other Softlines/Activewear trends, Luce said, “Under Armour and Nike are our largest volume brands. Both brands are favorable for sports, activewear, workout and in athleisure wear. UA and Nike are trusted brands with our customer base and they provide a wide assortment

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— **Kim Luce**, AAFES Buyer, Men’s Athletic Apparel



Luce

to meet their active needs.”

Another top brand is adidas, which Luce said, “is performing very well for us. It is having exponential growth in the U.S. and abroad. We have increased our budget to accommodate for growth in 2018, and are planning to roll out fixtures to additional BeFit locations.”

Luce added that this expansion “will not affect current spacing in our BeFit stores,” and overall, “in stores, floor space will continue to be the same.”

Other brands that Luce said are currently doing well in Exchange stores include Champion and Hanes branded apparel, “which are having nice increases in business,” and the private label PBX Pro line.

The availability of branded apparel and private label garments “provide our customers with a layering of price points that cater to all of their budgets,” the buyer noted.

SALES RISE

The increase in subcategory strength in AAFES stores has been reflected in sales. Luce reported that year-to-date sales through the end of October in the Softlines/Activewear area were \$51 million versus \$48 million during the same period a year earlier, reflecting a 6-percent sales increase.

Year-to-date gross margin (GM) dollars through the same period were \$18 million, a roughly 4-percent increase against \$17.3 million for the same period the prior year.

VOSB

One program that Luce is excited about is the Veterans online shopping benefit (VOSB), which debuted this month on Veterans Day, Nov. 11.

“We are expecting an increase in volume on eCommerce due to the launch of VOSB,” Luce said. “We have fortified quantities and sizing to accommodate extra business online.”

— **E and C NEWS**

“Athleisure” style apparel, including here at Peterson AFB, Colo., is riding the crest of a wave of interest. Year-to-date sales through the end of October in this area were \$51 million, reflecting a 6-percent increase.

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