

Season 5 Episode 3

CRAFT with Chris DiTullio

Guests include Kyla Moran Maloney, Faye Lynn Wilde, and Lily Epler

DESCRIPTION

If craft is having a heyday, and the numbers confirm it is, why did the store built to serve makers go bankrupt twice in one year? The craft store died, but the making didn't. In fact, one of our featured voices in the opener notes that she mourns the loss - delivered by her unprompted. There really wasn't - and still isn't - anything like it for some guests. We explore this with Chris DiTullio, former Chief Commercial Officer and interim CEO of Joann's. We explore making, craft, grief and recovery.

SHOW NOTES

AI generated transcript: errors, missed attributions and omissions may occur as part of the technical processes

00:00:03:13 - 00:00:04:18

Cristene

Hi, Jeff.

00:00:04:20 - 00:00:05:23

Jeff

Hi, Christine.

00:00:06:00 - 00:00:35:16

Cristene

In a moment, you'll hear from makers, and they are talking about their craft. And then you'll hear from a person who helped them make it happen. That thump that Kyla is describing is a bolt hitting the cutting table. Faye still makes as much as she ever did. She drives further now and pays more, and it's worth asking what she's driving toward, because it wasn't only the materials that moved the know how moved.

00:00:35:17 - 00:00:53:12

Cristene

Where do you learn how to set a sleeve, or fix a bobbin, or pick a yarn that won't bias on you? For a long time, the answer was an employee in an aisle who had been there 20 years. Now it's a shop owner who dies her own, a guild of six people around a table on a Tuesday night.

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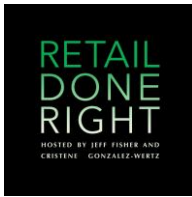
Cristene

We had to find our own ways to do it.

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Jeff

The star count says the same thing from the outside. There are more than 31,000 fabric and craft stores in this country, and that number went up 2% last year, more of them smaller, but closer to home. Joanne sold materials at a scale nobody could match, and that was a real thing to give people.



Mastery may not have been on the shelf at Joann or anywhere of its size.

00:01:24:14 - 00:01:39:08

Jeff

Mastery is what makers organize around now. And it's local. It's shared. It doesn't scale the way a Planet Gram does.

00:01:39:10 - 00:02:03:17

Kyla

So I grew up with a group of very crafty people that my parents had made friends with when they were in college at Michigan State, and the main hobby that they connected through was medieval reenactment, which meant that while you're hanging out with your friends and talking about how your day was and what your plans were for the weekend, you were doing it in medieval outfits.

00:02:03:23 - 00:02:31:05

Kyla

When I'm making medieval outfits and what we call garb, that's for some reason a much more authentic, and it's a different vibe than making costumes. And I can't really explain it. But a big part of it is because garb is focused on trying to figure out how and why people were doing things in past ages by living it, by experiencing it.

00:02:31:05 - 00:03:01:17

Kyla

And the stuff that I've been made as a costume looked really good and looked very medieval and was completely nonfunctional. So it scratches two different itches and scratches. The itch of how can I make something as close of a facsimile representation of something else that I've seen? And then the other part is, how can I account for the problems and experiences and needs that I'm going to have when I'm in this outfit and design a really clever outfit around it?

00:03:01:21 - 00:03:06:01

Cristene

That's wild. So how do you find and get stuff to do this?

00:03:06:04 - 00:03:27:12

Kyla

Great question. It used to be a lot easier, especially because our big event is in the summer. I've had summers where my mom and I were going to Joann Fabrics twice a day because we realized we need more buttons or we're out of bias tape, or that thread doesn't match, or I need more lining or interfacing. And that was actually a really cool experience.

00:03:27:13 - 00:04:03:10

Kyla

Like, oh, I deeply, viscerally miss the of them unrolling like it's deep in my soul and I haven't found another place to get that. And going to Joann's meant you were surrounded by people who were probably in the middle of a project. They were doing the thing because just like going to a hardware store, like you go there, you know, you go there the first time to get the materials for your project, and you go there the next eight times because you forgot something, or you learn something, and then going to the store and seeing other people who are doing the same process of like, I'm trying a



thing.

00:04:03:11 - 00:04:25:20

Kyla

I'm learning. I didn't do it right. I feel like cultural space that disappeared. I don't have a lot of spaces now where I can go, and I know that most other people there are also probably like ripping out seams and swearing and thinking like, oh, I can't wait to make this. And then halfway through, like, this is no longer made with love.

00:04:25:20 - 00:04:44:24

Kyla

And then the end is like, I was triumphant, but we don't go to Joann's to be like, I was triumphant. You went to Joann's to be like, I am starting or I am in the middle. There are a few independent businesses near where I live now that do like sewing classes, and they do have some fabric. There's like quilting shops.

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Kyla

It all became really focused. It all became really fractured. You can go to a place, but it has to be for the specific way that you plan on crafting. The best thing I can think of doing is actually finding a hobby like the one I'm in, because you can find the like minded group of people and they all do stitch and bitches or craft nights or like there's a regular like come over to my house, we're all going to sew night.

00:05:13:20 - 00:05:25:04

Kyla

You kind of have to craft your own crafting fit, but we took away the individual entry point pretty swiftly.

00:05:25:06 - 00:05:38:20

Cristene

Say we've had so many conversations about making, I want to start with this Renaissance Faire thing. I've seen pictures of you and your fiance and your dog dressed for the fair.

00:05:38:23 - 00:05:56:23

Kyla

I remember being so upset that I was not getting a handmade princess dress for the Ren Fair, and my dad came to the rescue. He actually made me something to wear. So my father has been a really huge influence. Am I sewing? Am I making journey?

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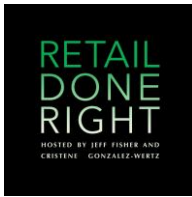
Cristene

When we talked.

00:05:57:23 - 00:05:58:11

Kyla

Recently.



00:05:58:11 - 00:06:03:15

Cristene

You mentioned to me that you were on the hunt for gold and silver pleather.

00:06:03:17 - 00:06:27:15

Kyla

Oh, gosh. Yeah, well, we were out talking about that. Joann's had come up, you know, rip. I'm Lauren Joann's. Every day that it's gone. I did find gold and silver pleather, but I had to drive 45 minutes out into Amish country to find it at a big warehouse. So it's become a little bit more difficult to make the things that I want to make.

00:06:27:15 - 00:06:31:20

Kyla

But nevertheless, we persevere. My mom.

00:06:31:20 - 00:07:06:06

Faye

Got me into everything growing up. She's always been a Soest. She made my clothing up until time I was like six. She constructed all of my skidding costumes and she would spend hours on end dazzling them. Then to lots of swearing. Was involved in that growing up, watching her mend my clothing, make clothing from absolutely nothing like hand tracing the patterns, taking my measurements, everything like that.

00:07:06:08 - 00:07:37:10

Faye

But yeah, she got me into upcycling and she got me into the process of understanding that clothing is always going to be made by someone, and that it needs to be nurtured. And it's our due diligence to keep extending the life of that article of clothing, making sure that it doesn't end up in a landfill. I've always been like, scrappy and into more like Kashi stuff like found media.

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Faye

So like when I went off on my own and with the longer like under my mom's wing, having her tell me like what exact materials I needed. The nostalgia kind of wore off for Joanne's a little bit. So like going forward and going to more of the small businesses in like Amish country, like you said, or out in reading, there's a giant fabric mart too.

00:08:02:11 - 00:08:22:11

Kyla

Yeah. I went to a place called zinc, I think it was out in Hummelstown, which it was incredible. I absolutely loved going there. I guess when I say I mourn Joann's, I mourn the convenience of it all. It was so great to be able to go out there and just find what I needed super quick and get out of there so I can get back to the making.

00:08:22:11 - 00:08:43:15

Kyla

Instead of having to drive an hour. One way to hope that they have something that I need. When I went to zinc, I was talking to my fiance afterwards and I was like, that place is exactly what I thought



it was going to be, because I walked in and I was like, hey, I need this thing. And the old ladies there were like, what do you need it for?

00:08:43:15 - 00:08:56:10

Kyla

So I showed them the project and they were like, you're asking for the wrong thing. Old ladies that. So things are an invaluable resource because they know everything. I can't wait to be one. Yeah.

00:08:56:12 - 00:09:15:18

Cristene

And we're seeing stuff now, especially in Lancaster, where we all live. We have active maker markets. How do they fit into what used to be, you know. Joann's never really occupied that space. They were never the outlet for goods.

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Kyla

It's kind of bittersweet for me because like I said, the convenience is gone with Joann's being gone. But on the flip side of that, I have found so many incredible small mom and pop shops or like locally owned, indie owned companies to buy my things from. It fosters such an incredible community to have these kinds of of retailers that, you know, they're owned by someone I can run into at the grocery store.

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Cristene

Lily, can you name drop some of the communities where you actually work? You had mentioned to me you moved away from Etsy, and I want to understand why you moved away from Etsy, but sort of who's filled in that gap?

00:09:59:23 - 00:10:33:12

Faye

So yeah, I mentioned to you that I moved away from Etsy and Depop too, mostly because of dropshipping and how impersonal stuff had become and how kind of diluted the market had become for actual artisan pieces. It just doesn't foster a community for creativity. So when there's local, I live right downtown Lancaster, and there's places like Curio and Snake and Skiing that are both amazing and both hold community events.

00:10:33:14 - 00:10:39:21

Faye

Curio is the reason that I have 13 new hobbies. It's amazing being in an area like this.

00:10:40:02 - 00:10:44:03

Cristene

For you guys. This whole notion of quote.

00:10:44:03 - 00:10:44:19

Kyla

Unquote.



00:10:44:20 - 00:11:01:15

Cristene

Retail is not about buying. It's also very much about community and information exchange and this sense of being a part of something.

00:11:01:17 - 00:11:26:06

Jeff

I am really excited to welcome Chris De Tullio to our conversation. I met Chris when he was the Chief Customer Officer at Joann, and I led a consulting project focused on visual merchandizing improvements. He went on to become the interim CEO of Joann, and as of now, he's consulting focused on building, fixing and leading businesses. Chris, welcome to retail.

00:11:26:06 - 00:11:27:04

Jeff

Done right.

00:11:27:08 - 00:11:29:24

Chris

Thanks, Jeff. It's great to be here.

00:11:30:01 - 00:11:35:04

Jeff

When people tell the Joann story, what do they get wrong?

00:11:35:06 - 00:11:56:21

Chris

Yeah, I think the biggest misconception that was out there and is out there is that that Joann had this aging customer base and that sewing was this dying craft. Whether I talked to banks or investors or even friends or professional acquaintances, that was always the comment, oh, you know, Joann must have gone away because people just aren't doing that anymore.

00:11:56:22 - 00:12:23:19

Chris

And that really, as you guys know, that couldn't be further from the truth. Unfortunately, Joann went away because of some ugly realities of capital structures and debt loads, and the relevance of the brand was there. We had millions of deeply, deeply loyal customers who loved the brand and stayed with us through the last day and even after. It was a healthy brand that had some unfortunate financial realities that caused it to exit.

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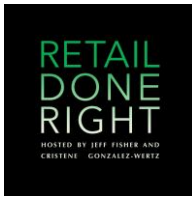
Cristene

Who was the Joann shopper really then? And what do you know about her or him that outsiders never saw?

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Chris

Well, that's exactly actually what you just said. There is one of those things. When I started walking our stores after I joined the company and the company at that time, and this was in 2005, 2006 was



only talking about her. And and certainly the female customer was the most important customer and the majority. But what I learned in talking to our team members and walking our stores is we had a lot of men in our stores, and the research ended up telling me about 30% of the Joann shoppers were men, and they were doing lots of different fiber crafts.

00:13:06:16 - 00:13:34:10

Chris

They were doing lots of painting, woodworking, all of those things which we carried the supplies for. And so when we went on a journey in the 2015, 2016 time frame, it was really to better understand our customer. And what we found was that switching to what motivates them, what motivates you as a person to do these things versus a demographic, your gender, your age?

00:13:34:13 - 00:13:57:09

Chris

We learned a lot more about our customer. We learned that there's this community of people who love to quilt. So knit they teach, they have small businesses. So when you ask about who the Joann shopper was, it was people that did all of these things. Making your first Halloween costume for your child. It was the entry point for many for sewing.

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Cristene

And to that end, that's what we heard from Kyla. The first thing she said was that some thump, thump, thump, thump, thump of unrolling fabric. And once you hear it, you know exactly what she means.

00:14:08:17 - 00:14:09:06

Chris

Yes.

00:14:09:07 - 00:14:15:13

Jeff

And I think that fabric bar or the cut counter, as you said, was really the heart of the store.

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Chris

It was.

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Jeff

That really leaned into the heritage of Joann or the history of Joann.

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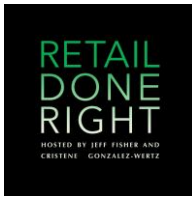
Cristene

It's how you gather around the table.

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Jeff

Exactly, exactly. Very much.



00:14:24:21 - 00:14:43:09

Chris

It is. And all of our customers knew the names of the team members that worked at our cut counter. You know, when you would be in our stores, it was, you know. Hi, Pam. Hi, Susan. Hi, Joe. And everyone knew each other. And that was a really interesting part of the Joann experience.

00:14:43:12 - 00:15:00:13

Jeff

And from my experience in your stores, they had, I think, the most tenure in the most expertise resolved around that fabric. They knew where every bolt was. But is there something Joann did for makers that nothing has replaced yet?

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Chris

Jeff, I think it's community is how I would answer that question. A physical human presence community. Joann wasn't just a store, it was actually something they called their happy place. We did surveys and we did research, and our customers would use that phrase over and over again. Why do you come to Joann? It's my happy place. And they didn't care about the shopping plaza.

00:15:25:20 - 00:15:51:14

Chris

They didn't care about the age of the fixtures or the paint on the walls. They knew when they walked in, they knew that they were part of a community of employees and fellow customers. That all had something in common. There was to use the phrase, there was a common thread there. And, you know, I think when I look out in retail today, there's a lot of companies that put fabric and yarn on shelves and they declare their in the business.

00:15:51:16 - 00:16:15:23

Chris

But what I don't feel like people have figured out is that truly winning this customer requires more than just having the inventory in your store. It's hiring members of the community who were just as passionate about the making and the creating and the activity as the customers who were walking in to buy. It takes intention. It takes effort to do.

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Jeff

A community of makers, because the people that were helping you were makers themselves. Exactly right.

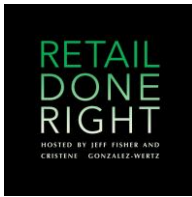
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Cristene

Here's the tension I keep running into. The makers tell us that they're making more than ever, but they're also monetizing it. And so while making is up, the big box craft stores are down. How do you square that? Is this a category story? Is it a retail model story?

00:16:44:06 - 00:17:10:14

Chris



Yeah. Christine, I agree, and I think it's more of a retail model story, not a category story. And to your point, making has never been more relevant, whether it's the wellness movement, the DIY economy, Gen Z wanting to make to personalize their look and their spaces and the craft, big boxes aren't necessarily designed to facilitate or really engage that customer in the way that they're looking for.

00:17:10:20 - 00:17:31:19

Chris

But make no mistake, the category is up. Gen Z is making their crafting. They're knitting their sewing all at higher rates than any generation since the baby boomers. You know, one of the things that we saw in the past was that there was a dip, because the Gen X timeframe schools stopped teaching these skills.

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Cristene

Oh, you're right.

00:17:33:12 - 00:17:34:23

Jeff

There's no more home Ek.

00:17:34:24 - 00:17:39:06

Cristene

Well, it's not only there's no more home, there's far fewer art classes to.

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Chris

Exactly, exactly. So the industry did have a dip because we kind of lost Gen X a little bit in a way. But then the reason why Gen Z has come back so strong is that people are still motivated to create and make, but now Gen Z has tools that the other generation didn't have. They've got TikTok, they've got Instagram, they've got YouTube, they've got all of these places digitally that can help them with skill building and inspiration.

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Chris

And now they're looking for retailers that can pay that off in a way that that is differentiated.

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Jeff

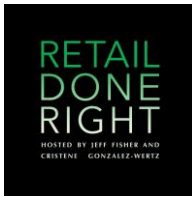
So I'm going to ask you the \$64,000 question. So if you were building fresh today with everything, you know, what would you build and what does a craft store have to do to still be standing ten years, 20 years down the line?

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Cristene

Way to go, Jeff. Asking six questions in one.

00:18:33:24 - 00:18:42:24



Jeff

Yeah, I know, I know, I know, it's like the kitchen sink question. And can you say that in 30 words or less, please?

00:18:43:02 - 00:19:12:18

Chris

I will do my best. So it would be something smaller than what I see out there today. The real big boxes, the skew warehouses, if you will. They're not inspirational. They're not motivating to this Gen Z shopper. That's not what they're looking for. I mean, they want obviously accessibility to the supplies that they need. But from an environment standpoint, they're looking for something different space for not just education but space for collaboration.

00:19:12:18 - 00:19:34:06

Chris

And that's what we kept seeing in our research, is that they didn't necessarily want to come take a class on knitting, necessarily, but they wanted a space of, hey, I'd like to bring my knitting guild in to your space, and we want to be able to make and create here and engage with each other. And so I would have a space for that kind of engagement.

00:19:34:08 - 00:19:58:02

Chris

You know, I'd be connecting with local colleges and local seamstresses and tailors and people like that so that they could bring their businesses sort of into the ecosystem. So really connecting locally, having a space for creativity and then having a curated assortment that was a lot more directed towards this type of customer.

00:19:58:04 - 00:20:18:05

Cristene

Lily, one of the people I spoke with brought that up as well. The newer local entries are smaller, they are more niche and they build in not just the making, but also the selling and not just the buying experience. Do you think that's part of the format that survives?

00:20:18:10 - 00:20:40:04

Chris

I do, I do. I think that, you know, making to sell is a big component of this industry. And certainly, you know, some of the online marketplaces saw that growth earlier this decade. But many of these people don't want the hassle of setting up an online shop and having to manage virtual inventories and everything that's associated with that.

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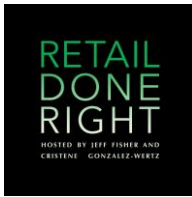
Chris

They want to just be able to put their goods out that they've made with love usually, and be able to interact with people and sell. And so I think having a space that allows those types of activities is how we move forward in this industry.

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Cristene

And as you said, to have that community to say, I'm struggling with this, but not necessarily to have



it from an employee, but to have it from another maker to say, I can't get, you know, this to lay flat or a friend of mine. Actually, Quill's that's the folded, papery thing.

00:21:13:19 - 00:21:42:15

Chris

You know, one of the things that we found in our research was that customers, what they were looking for when they came in, wasn't necessarily just an answer to a question. They can get that online. What they wanted was that human interaction because it helped give them confidence. The element that was missing, that's missing from a lot of the online tools is the confidence that you get as a human interacting with another human who's trying to help you succeed.

00:21:42:19 - 00:21:56:04

Jeff

It makes sense. Someone like Joanne had the scale to support that and a much, much different way than the guilds in the clubs, but it is that connection to the community.

00:21:56:06 - 00:22:10:03

Cristene

Yeah. I'm blessed. I'm in a guild market, so the guild is here, but those classes are sold out three months in advance. I mean, seriously, it's wild.

00:22:10:05 - 00:22:25:06

Jeff

So Chris, I'm going to play up on my multi questions. And you can take this in which way you want. What do you mourn and or what are you glad you got to do at Joanne.

00:22:25:08 - 00:22:50:00

Chris

Sure. And the first question there what do you mourn. That's a pretty easy answer. I'm more in the customers actually, because of what Joanne meant to them. And for many, it was like losing a family member and you would see it in social media. You still do. As a matter of fact, I try and avoid it. My daughter will show me TikToks of, you know, people that are posting in front of a closed door.

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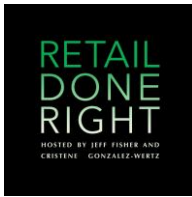
Chris

Maybe they're near a street sign that says Joanne in there recounting a memory. And so that's who I mourn. It was the millions of customers who really felt that Joanne was their happy place, and the fact that no one is really replicating what Joanne represented to them. I also mourn the employees, the 18,000 team members that Joanne had who showed up every day because they believed in the brand and they believed in what we stood for and the role that they played within their communities.

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Chris

And the quick story here is it goes back to Covid. Actually, in 2020, cloth masks were a good alternative if you didn't have anything else. So while we at the corporate office were fighting for what was known at the time was essential retailer status to keep our doors open. In our communities are 18,000 team members mobilized to create free mask making supplies for the community, with cotton fabric elastic in a pattern which we were able to provide them with, and we gave away



millions of free kits in our communities.

00:24:01:11 - 00:24:33:15

Chris

And if that wasn't cool enough, something else happened because then our customers mobilized with our employees to start making those masks and giving them away to EMS workers, nurses, police, anyone in their community that was having to interact with the public that defines who Joanne was from a customer standpoint, from an employee standpoint. And, you know, it's why I'll always be proud to have been part of that.

00:24:33:16 - 00:24:36:15

Jeff

That is truly the connection to the community right there.

00:24:36:17 - 00:24:59:19

Cristene

I think I got all of my masks either from makers. I never had the official masks. I had masks that matched everything I own. I still have a drawer full of them, just in case. But when I get your insights on this multi-generational shopping and crafting thing. Before we started recording, I told you about going fabric shopping with my mom.

00:24:59:20 - 00:25:16:14

Cristene

All of the makers we spoke with talked about that same kind of a relationship. How do we how does a store foster that support and encourage those kinds of things so that we don't lose the skills?

00:25:16:18 - 00:25:53:16

Chris

We certainly saw what you described in our stores from a customer standpoint, right. Generational shopping, especially around holiday time frames. But the other thing that you've reminded me of is what our employee mix was basically retired makers, retired people who love to make. So folks that are, you know, between 60 and 75, say, round numbers, and teenagers who are working college second jobs after school, high school like teenagers and seniors, and they loved each other.

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Chris

It was amazing to see those two, right. You know, separated generations connect. And they connected because the older generation has something to give, and they're willing to give it without it being like a class or a formal thing. And I remember we had a Cincinnati store where we had a young woman who was going to college and working at Joann part time, and at the same store.

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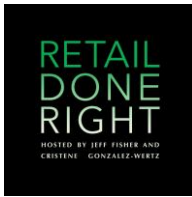
Chris

We had a woman who was at the time having her 100th birthday.

00:26:27:16 - 00:26:28:14

Cristene

My gosh.



00:26:28:14 - 00:27:03:00

Chris

And the college age young woman ended up making the 100 year old woman a TikTok star at the time. And she would post TikToks of her asking the older woman questions about her experiences, her life tips and tricks. Like all of these things, it was amazing to see those generations, the younger people and the older people come together in our stores was again, part of why Joann's community in here was so different than because you don't see that when you walk out of the retail.

00:27:03:01 - 00:27:04:01

Jeff

No you don't.

00:27:04:02 - 00:27:05:17

Cristene

Oh, I love that answer.

00:27:05:20 - 00:27:28:18

Chris

It was such a big part of my life. I was there for 19 years. You know, I started with the company when the founding family was still running the business and became friends with them to this day. The company started in 1943 by two families that were immigrants in Cleveland, and were still running the business in 2005 2006 when I joined the company.

00:27:28:19 - 00:27:31:01

Cristene

One more, one more. Was there a Joann?

00:27:31:03 - 00:27:45:14

Chris

Joann was kind of a combination of two of the daughters names that were pulled together. The very quick story, and this is maybe sounds funny, but it's true is the company was called Cleveland Fabrics, and that's because that's where they were founded.

00:27:45:14 - 00:27:47:12

Cristene

Really not as interesting as Joann.

00:27:47:13 - 00:28:03:22

Chris

Not at all. And they were going to go up in a store in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. And at the time, and still to this day, Cleveland and Pittsburgh were big rivals in football. And the mayor of Pittsburgh said, I don't know how Cleveland fabric is going to sell in Pittsburgh.

00:28:04:02 - 00:28:06:00

Jeff

That name is not going to work here.



00:28:06:06 - 00:28:16:03

Chris

Yes. And so it caused the family to think, you know what? Maybe we should have changed. And so it became two of the daughters names that were merged together. And the rest is history.

00:28:16:04 - 00:28:17:03

Jeff

Fantastic.

00:28:17:07 - 00:28:28:20

Cristene

Thank you so much for joining us at retail. Done right. We hope you'll come back and talk to us about not only where you go next, but your observations of categories is there, emerging.

00:28:28:21 - 00:28:30:05

Jeff

Thank you so much, Chris.

00:28:30:07 - 00:28:34:17

Chris

Absolutely. A pleasure to be with you guys today.

00:28:34:19 - 00:28:50:12

Cristene

And now I'd like to return to our makers for a moment. They're looking for community, but I think they're also looking for something more. Most retailers are trying to figure out how to get you through the checkout more quickly, or figuring out how to stock a shelf. You know.

00:28:50:17 - 00:29:15:09

Kyla

It's very profound to understand the knowledge is the only thing you can give away and still keep for yourself. So being able to share what you know and how to make things with the community is the most valuable resource in this aspect of my life. I want to meet people, I want to learn things, and I don't want to learn the TikTok watered down version of something.

00:29:15:15 - 00:29:30:12

Kyla

I don't want a pattern because it's easy. I want a pattern because it's beautiful. And even if it takes me two years to make it. I've made it. Money can't buy that. And that's also not a feeling that you can, can and reproduce and sell. No.

00:29:30:12 - 00:29:34:20

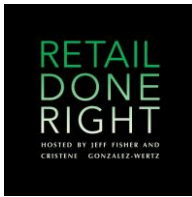
Cristene

But you can create spaces that allow that to happen.

00:29:34:21 - 00:30:06:03

Kyla

I think this whole time there's been two holes that needed filled. One was convenience and one was



community. And now with Joanne's gone, I find that the community aspect that we have all been wanting has had more space to flourish and thrive, particularly in Lancaster. I think we're so lucky to be here in Lancaster for this change, because Lancaster is already a community that so deeply cares about each other and the community and being with each other.

00:30:06:04 - 00:30:15:20

Cristene

I think that's a fascinating and wonderful place for us to end. It's crazy to me that my mother sewed my clothes to when I was a kid.

00:30:16:00 - 00:30:37:24

Kyla

I think this making community and I think the run fair, and I think all of these things where people are just lifting up each other. Are the product of how hard fought these communities have been by our grandmothers and our mothers and our mothers for generations. And it's not something that I am willing to ever let go of.

00:30:38:01 - 00:30:53:05

Kyla

There's a very distinct social contract in the makers community that you definitely must abide by. Or you you can't be there and most of it is making your damn self. Don't use AI and be nice to each other.

00:30:53:06 - 00:30:59:20

Cristene

Okay, well thank you ladies, I appreciate you.

00:30:59:22 - 00:31:21:12

Cristene

There is a separation in making and makers still three institutions. Now do what one big box was never designed to do. There are guilds that teach skill and drive apprenticeship. There are juried shows that set the bar, and there are conventions and fairs and other things that give us deadlines to work to.

00:31:21:17 - 00:31:31:19

Jeff

You're right, of course. I actually submitted photographs to the San Diego County Fair in Del Mar, California one year and won a couple acknowledgments.

00:31:31:21 - 00:31:32:16

Cristene

Of course you did.

00:31:32:17 - 00:31:43:06

Jeff

I still have those photographs with the acknowledgments on the back. And I think you had a dried flowers business two, didn't you?



00:31:43:07 - 00:31:44:13

Cristene

I did.

00:31:44:15 - 00:31:45:16

Jeff

Were a part of this.

00:31:45:17 - 00:32:11:04

Cristene

We are yet none of those kinds of entities I named sell whatever they sell in quite the same way. Consider all of the events supporting makers. Long's Park, Lancaster, running since 1979. 200 juried artists, 25 categories, 15 to 20,000 people over Labor Day weekend. That's my home field advantage.

00:32:11:06 - 00:32:28:02

Jeff

Philadelphia museum of Art Contemporary Craft Show 50th year this November 190 juried artists, 13 disciplines, more than \$15 million contributed the museum and no sales commission taken.

00:32:28:03 - 00:32:47:20

Cristene

Let's go to the largest, which is the Ann Arbor Art fair, largest juried art fair in the country, nearly 1000 artists, 30 city blocks, close to half a million people over three days. The modern quilt guild has more than 1600 members worldwide organized into those local guilds.

00:32:48:00 - 00:32:51:10

Jeff

Christine 16,000 members.

00:32:51:11 - 00:32:52:12

Speaker 7

Oh geez, Louise.

00:32:52:13 - 00:32:54:16

Jeff

That is crazy.

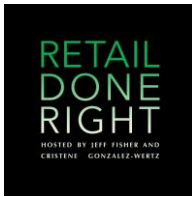
00:32:54:16 - 00:33:29:05

Cristene

And the deadlines dictate the production schedules. But, you know, going back to where we started, New York Comic Con, where Kyla and I know she's been and I know she's dressed up. I've seen the costumes. New York Comic Con drew 250,000 people last year, 250,000 people in San Diego, where you've been. It's run since 1970. What matters is that a con and a fair opening are a production schedule, and 250,000 people will see your seams.

00:33:29:09 - 00:33:57:04

Jeff



It's remarkable. Social media helps, the internet participates. But making is still one person and their hands doing something unique. Joanne was invited to many of their tables, participated and celebrated their achievements, but it didn't get them to the next step. As retailers reinvent themselves for the next chapter, it's worth considering where the people are moving to and how to be a part of that.

00:33:57:05 - 00:34:21:12

Jeff

Lily's comments have really stayed with me. Can a national retailer deliver the true, community centric point of view she talked about? She expressed community in a beautiful way. If there's one nugget to take away from this, it's how Lily speaks to community, to connection. I'm not sure I've heard it express in such an honest, in real way before.

00:34:21:12 - 00:34:22:07

Jeff

Christine.

00:34:22:10 - 00:34:46:09

Cristene

The conversations we've had have been exceptional. They remind me that making is a skill, but being a maker is a business. And the difference, especially in my conversations with Lily, have been around pricing and merchandizing and curation. And Joanne never taught that. No big box does. It's not a failing of a company. Is this something that any big box format can hold?

00:34:46:10 - 00:35:07:10

Cristene

I'm not sure, because I think a lot of it is small and local, even if that means that I don't see your photographs win, or you don't see the wreath that I was asked to make for a local shop. Jeff, all of this has made me hungry. And there's a brand new empanada shop in town. Then let's go shopping.

00:35:07:12 - 00:35:14:02

Jeff

Let's go eating. Yum.

00:35:14:03 - 00:35:23:15

Cristene

This is retail. Done right. Thank you for joining the conversation. Subscribe on Apple Podcasts, Spotify or your favorite platform and visit retail. Done right yet?

00:35:23:20 - 00:35:31:06

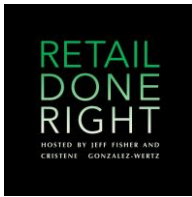
Jeff

And connect with Christine and me on LinkedIn and follow retail. Done right on Instagram. We love hearing from you.

00:35:31:08 - 00:35:42:23

Cristene

Warm thanks to our editor, Michael Cook and our theme music composer, JD. There was so much great conversation around the makers today and we hope you enjoyed it.

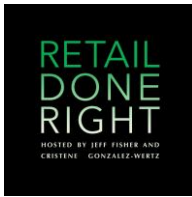


RESEARCH, REFERENCES & SOURCES

- Store counts and industry revenue: IBISWorld, Fabric, Craft and Sewing Supplies Stores in the US, February 2026.
- Show figures: each organization's own 2026 call for artists and event pages, plus LNP for Long's Park attendance.
- Guild membership: Modern Quilt Guild site
- TKGA certification count via Wikipedia citing TKGA, confirm at tkga.org before air
- Convention attendance: Wikipedia, worth a check against organizers.

The Joann PE story

- CNBC on the 2010 deal. \$1.6 billion, \$61 a share, a 34% premium, and the same firm was buying J.Crew with TPG a month earlier
cnbc.com/2010/12/23/joann-stores-to-go-private-in-deal-worth-16-billion.html
- Retail Dive on the 2021 IPO, which is the detail that makes the story land: Leonard Green would still control the company after taking it public
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- PESP's 2024 tracker: Private equity played a role in 56% of large corporate bankruptcies, 27 of 48 filings, and 11% of all corporate bankruptcies, while accounting for 6.5% of the economy. At least 65,850 layoffs.
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- The Q1 2025 update names Joann directly: 9,000 employees laid off when it liquidated.
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- Michaels went through the same machine, twice. Bain and Blackstone took it private in 2006 for \$6 billion, one of the largest retail LBOs of its era. It re-IPO'd in 2014. Apollo took it private again in 2021 at \$22 a share.
cnbc.com/2021/03/03/crafts-retailer-michaels-to-be-bought-by-apollo-global-for-5-billion.html
- Both national craft big boxes were owned by private equity. One is dead and the other bought its intellectual property. The one still standing without a PE owner is Hobby Lobby, which is family-held.
- The Dallas Morning News piece adds the line that matters: the Apollo deal was expected to add to Michaels' already high debt, and Apollo's other retail holdings included Linens 'n Things, which went bankrupt under its ownership.
dallasnews.com/business/retail/2021/03/03/arts-and-crafts-retailer-michaels-to-be-sold/



- Fortune on the transformation from retail darling to bankruptcy
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 - PESP's piece specifically on Leonard Green's pattern of bankruptcies
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 - The Robin Report, Joann's Bankruptcy: A Failure of Imagination,
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 - A history of Cleveland's garment industry, which grounds the 1943 founding in something
beltmag.com/history-garment-industry-jewish-immigration-cleveland/
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