

Young Local Meets Success By Design

ITALIAWEAR International. It sounds like a large syndicate, or a fashion designer from Italy, home to such names as Ferrari, Armani and Benetton.

At any rate, clothes buyers are emptying racks full of Italiawear, creating yet another order for 21-year-old Watsonville resident Tony Cordova and his Italiawear International.

Despite a sure future in his father's business as a champion race-horse broker, Tony started his own company, intending to create his own opportunity.

"My father, Joe, is very successful," said Cordova. "He's one of the best at what he does. I knew that if I got into the business that it would be years before people looked at me as Tony, not just Joe's boy. I wanted to be looked at on my own merit, for my own success."

Cordova started Italiawear almost two years ago. Of Italian ancestry, he designed a logo featuring a banner symbolic of the Italian flag. He then applied for trademark status and hired a graphic artist to print the logo on material.

After enrolling in marketing classes at Cabrillo College, Cordova began production with the purchase of plain, unadorned sweat shirts, tank tops, pants and caps. Silicon Valley Screen Printing then printed the clothing with his logo.

A weight lifter and fitness buff, he introduced his new line of active wear to friends and acquaintances. Sales were swift.

"It was my way of trail marketing," Cordova quipped. With a show of success, he began expanding after a few months.

Kim Marquez of Watsonville came on as a designer and his No. 1 assistant. Jason Crandon, also of Watsonville, handles receipts and transportation of goods, while San Josean John Alameda heads up sales and distribution.



Jason Crandon and Tony Cordova look over Cordova's Italiawear line.

Cordova's expansion brought increased sales. "We are experiencing a 70-percent 'sell-through' in a two-week interval," said buyer Michael Kunz at Ford's department store. "What Tony has right now is hot. Whether it stays that way is up to Tony, and his ability to ride the waves of the industry."

Kunz applauded Tony's recent decision to change dye colors in his logo, which added zest to the line. The first two shipments of Italiawear did well enough to negotiate another purchase.

Besides negotiating with buyers

from Miller's Outpost, Macy's and Emporium Capwell, Cordova is working with representatives of Delta International and buyers from both Japan and Colombia, South America.

Cordova is aware that the fashion industry is ever-changing. What's popular today might be tomorrow's rags. Trends and styles change as quickly as the leader in a horse race.

While Cordova may have made a decision to stay away from the horses, another race has begun. And Cordova seems to be entering the first turn like a champion. •

— Ron Kavanaugh