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The Bon-Ton Stores, Inc. Expands Successful "Close to Home" Initiative With Launch Of New Online Sourcing Fair

CALLING ALL LOCAL MAKERS, ARTISANS AND ENTREPRENEURS TO APPLY ONLINE FOR CONSIDERATION

MILWAUKEE, Feb. 7, 2017 /PRNewswire/ -- The Bon-Ton Stores, Inc. (NASDAQ: BONT), which operates Bon-Ton, Bergner's, Boston Store, Carson's, Elder-Beerman, Herberger's and Younkers stores, plans to expand its "Close to Home" initiative by adding in-store shops to at least 100 stores this year after a successful launch in 45 stores in fall 2016. As part of the expansion, the retailer also announced the launch of the new "Close to Home" Online Sourcing Fair that invites local artists and designers, makers, artisans, and entrepreneurs with established businesses and galleries interested in having their products sold in "Close to Home" shops to apply online.



Product submissions for the first "Close to Home" Online Sourcing Fair are being accepted February 7 through March 24, 2017 at closetohome.bonton.com. Interested applicants must reside in one of Bon-Ton's [25 states](#) to apply for this exclusive opportunity. The company hopes the "Close to Home" Online Sourcing Fair will attract a large number of new and talented artisans and entrepreneurs eager to grow their small businesses and reach new audiences.

Open year round in-store and online, the "Close to Home" shops feature locally-sourced and themed products and were a hit during the 2016 fall and holiday shopping season. From September through December, "Close to Home" shop sales more than doubled projections and the company expects continued growth in 2017.

"Our regional merchandising teams carefully curated these shops to deliver customers a hometown shopping experience that reflects the tastes and buying preferences of our local communities," said Kathryn Bufano, president and CEO of The Bon-Ton Stores, Inc. "The 'Close to Home' shops have been a great opportunity for us to showcase local artisans and entrepreneurs and demonstrate our commitment to supporting the communities we serve."

More than 100 small businesses from 16 cities across eight states were featured in the initial launch of the "Close to Home" shops. For many, the opportunity to sell products in a major department store provided significant growth for their business.

"I doubled my yearly revenue in 2016 and had more sales in December than the entire previous 11 months combined," said Carma Wood, owner of Kiyi Kiyi Cosmetics in Willmar, Minnesota. "Being featured in a 'Close to Home' shop has allowed me to reach a wider audience of customers."

"With our products in the 'Close to Home' shop, we have seen not only an increase in sales, but an increase in overall brand awareness," commented Clint McMahon, owner of MPLS STP Clothing. "We are very grateful to be included because our business is all about helping people celebrate home and show their hometown pride."

"We started out selling primarily at craft fairs, farmers markets and a few boutiques, and then Bon-Ton called," said Kelley Grace Quakkelaar of Wisconsin's Gracie Designs, which produces hand-crafted wristlets and trucker hats for the 'Close to Home' shop. "It's been a significant ramping up of our business."

While each "Close to Home" shop is unique to its community, most shops include locally-themed apparel; glassware, pillows, blankets and home décor; handbags, scarves and other accessories; natural candles, bath and body products; and other unique giftable items. Many products are hand-crafted or made with locally-sourced materials.

Through the "Close to Home" Online Sourcing Fair, Bon-Ton plans to expand product offerings to include a broader selection of custom-designed and produced clothing and one-of-a-kind creations such as artwork, paintings, jewelry, décor and art objects crafted by local artists.

Bon-Ton aims to have "Close to Home" shops in at least 150 stores by mid-2017, representing more than half of the company's stores. As the program expands and rotates featured makers, new items will be added frequently and seasonally. As such, the "Close to Home" shops will always have fresh and unique product assortments. Bon-Ton will hold future online sourcing fairs as part of an ongoing effort to develop more relationships with local makers and curate a broader selection of local product offerings.

About The Bon-Ton Stores, Inc.

The Bon-Ton Stores, Inc., with corporate headquarters in York, Pennsylvania and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, operates 263 stores, which includes 9 furniture galleries and four clearance centers, in 25 states in the Northeast, Midwest and upper Great Plains under the Bon-Ton, Bergner's, Boston Store, Carson's, Elder-Beerman, Herberger's and Younkers nameplates. The stores offer a broad assortment of national and private brand fashion apparel and accessories for women, men and children, as well as cosmetics and home furnishings. The Bon-Ton Stores, Inc. is an active and positive participant in the communities it serves. For store locations and information, visit bonton.com. Join the conversation and be inspired by following Bon-Ton on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [Pinterest](#) and the fashion, beauty and lifestyle blog, [#LoveStyle](#).

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