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Athensmade Announces 2017 Business Ambassadors

A maker, an innovator, an educator, an entrepreneur, and two tech luminaries — these six local residents and business leaders were recognized for their excellence Monday, April 24th, as Athensmade announced its inaugural class of Business Ambassadors at the Athens-Clarke County Industry Appreciation Dinner & Awards.

Athensmade — a non-profit organization that exists to educate, support and promote homegrown brands, entrepreneurs and creative professionals — teamed up with the Athens-Clarke County Economic Development Department to name the first-ever class of Athensmade Business Ambassadors. Each Ambassador will serve on an advisory board, providing feedback to the Athensmade Board of Directors regarding challenges facing local businesses, and helping provide direction in developing services Athensmade will offer our community. They will also provide networking support to Athensmade and the local Economic Development Department, assisting in recruiting other businesses to Athens. Finally, each ambassador’s company commits to aiding in the wider effort to brand our city as a hub of activity and forward-thinking by incorporating the Athensmade logo on product packaging and publications.

During Monday’s event, held at The Cotton Press in Athens, Ga., Athensmade Executive Director Mary Charles Howard and Board Chairman Davis Knox presented six Ambassador awards — to makers Matt and Shayna Hobbs (proprietors of Sons of Sawdust), innovator Janet Geddis (owner/operator of Avid Bookshop), educator Lemuel “Life” LaRoche (Executive Director of Chess & Community), entrepreneur Chris Herron (CEO of Creature Comforts), and tech all-stars Alessio Artuffo (Chief Revenue Office of Docebo) and Ashlea Harris (US Operations Director of VoxPro).

“We’re looking forward to working with a great team of Athensmade Ambassadors in the year ahead,” says Howard. “All six of these business bring exciting developments to the Athens community, and each company is already doing great things to attract attention to our creative economy on a national level. Athensmade will continue to work with each Ambassador to amplify homegrown brands and attract talent to our great city.”
Meet the Ambassadors

Docebo, 2017 Athensmade Ambassador Company
With its office in downtown Athens, Docebo, meaning I will teach in Italian, is a leader in the Athens and global technology scene, providing cloud-based E-learning systems in more than 30 languages, sold in more than 80 countries. Started in Milan in 2005, they expanded to North America with a two-person operation based in Athens in 2013. Since its beginning, this business’s downtown office has grown from two employees to almost 40.

Just a few of the many awards won by Docebo are the Athens-Clarke Heritage Foundation’s Outstanding Rehabilitation Award for the renovation of the 160 E. Washington Street offices, GetApp’s Top Cloud LMS, and the Brandon Hall Group Award for Best Advance in Unique Learning Technology.

Alessio Artuffo is Docebo’s Chief Revenue Officer and the Athensmade Ambassador representative for Docebo. Chris McRae, Docebo’s Head of Global Implementations received Docebo’s 2017 Athensmade Ambassador award on behalf of Alessio at Monday’s event.

Voxpro, 2017 Athensmade Ambassador Company
Voxpro partners with some of the world’s most exciting and disruptive tech organizations to support their customers by delivering the world’s best customer experiences. Employing more than 1,700 people in six locations worldwide, VoxPro opened a downtown Athens office in August 2016. It has since grown to nearly 70 employees. Partners of this company include Google, Nest, and Airbnb -- the “anchor” client served primarily by the office in Athens.

Ashlea Harris is Voxpro’s US Operations Director and Athensmade Ambassador representative for Voxpro. Ashlea’s team — including Brent Lopp, Tamika Drake & Laura McGreevy — joined her on stage to receive Voxpro’s Athensmade Ambassador award.

Avid Bookshop, 2017 Athensmade Ambassador Company
Athenian and entrepreneur Janet Geddis says, in reference to her beloved store, “This is the best thing I’ve ever done in my life.” Her Avid Bookshop now has two locations, a 790-square-foot space on Prince Avenue, opened in October 2011, and a 1100-square-foot space in Five Points, opened in November 2016. Avid is resilient and innovative, being one of the first businesses of its kind to use crowdfunding to source its startup funds.

This business is known on a local and national level, voted Athens’ Favorite Local Business for six years in a row by Flagpole Magazine readers and nationally nominated as one of five finalists for Publishers Weekly 2017 Bookstore of the Year Award, which ranks independent bookstores across the United States.
Janet Geddis is Avid Bookshop’s founder, owner & operator and Athensmade Ambassador representative for Avid Booshop. UGA student and Avid bookseller Kate Rascoe accepted the Ambassador award on behalf of Geddis at Monday’s event.

Creature Comforts, 2017 Athensmade Ambassador Company
Like Avid Bookshop, Creature Comforts Brewing Company began in 2014, opening its doors to visitors from all over the world. This downtown business began operations with three full-time and 25 part-time employees and now employs 28 full-time and 31 part-time staffers.

In its first year, Creature Comforts was awarded the Athens-Clarke Heritage Foundation Award for outstanding rehabilitation of its downtown facility. Since then, this company has been featured in nine different publications for doing great things, including accolades like (2014) Highest Rated GA Brewery on “Beer Advocate,” (2015) Best New Brewery in America by Paste Magazine and (2016) One of Ten Reasons to Visit the South by Outside Magazine.

Chris Herron is Creature Comforts’ CEO and co-founder and Athensmade Ambassador representative for Creature Comforts. Katie Beauchamp, Tasting Room General Manager and Community Outreach Coordinator, and David Stein, Head Brewer/co-founder, accepted the Athensmade Ambassador award on behalf of Creature Comforts.

Chess & Community, 2017 Athensmade Ambassador Company
Since 2012, Chess & Community has been using the game of chess as a tool for helping young adults develop skills to manage impulsiveness and develop long-term thinking strategies that will prepare them for the responsibility of adulthood. This Athens-based nonprofit’s motto is “Think Before You Move,” encouraging students to evaluate their circumstances and plan steps to overcome challenges. In its early days, this nonprofit served only a handful of 8 - 12 students per week. The number has now grown to 80-100 students on any given week.

Chess & Community has been featured in its own documentary, and on NPR’s On Second Thought, CBS News, and most recently PBS NewsHour.

Lemuel “Life” LaRoche is Chess & Community’s Founder/Executive Director and Athensmade Ambassador for Chess & Community. Davis Knox presented Life with Chess & Community’s Athensmade Ambassador award.

Sons of Sawdust, 2017 Athensmade Ambassador Company
Sons of Sawdust is a family-owned woodworking business specializing in using reclaimed materials that are at least 100 years old. They will celebrate three years in business in May 2017. In those three years, this “maker” business has experienced tremendous grown. Boasting over 120,000 followers on Instagram, they have been
able to connect with people all over the world and have shipped their products across the U.S. Sons of Sawdust began with just three people in 2014 and now employs eight.

Sons of Sawdust has been featured on HGTV and DIY Network, and is sponsored by Ridgid power tool company and Carhartt clothing company.

**Matt Hobbs** is Sons of Sawdust’s COO and co-founder. His wife **Shayna Hobbs** is Sons of Sawdust’s Creative Director and co-founder. Together, Matt and Shayna serve as Athensmade Ambassadors for Sons of Sawdust. Upon receiving their Athensmade Ambassador Award at Monday evening’s awards, Shayna approached the podium to share her company’s story and how much the Athens’ creative community means to them, receiving a standing ovation.

“It was honestly quite surreal to receive an award in a room full of so many achievers,” said Sons of Sawdust co-founder Shayna Hobbs. “My purpose in telling a bit about our journey, was to testify to the power of community in Athens. I believe that in any other city we might have sunk to the bottom, but because of the town that Athens is, we were able to rise. We are truly humbled by the experience and grateful to Athensmade for valuing and believing in us. We love this community and desire to give back and help others rise up. We see the potential that our great city of Athens has to offer and we want to help spread the word.”

In addition to the 2017 class of Athensmade Business Ambassadors, several other manufacturing award winners were named and recognized at the ACC Industry Appreciation Awards. To learn more about Athensmade and our Ambassadors, visit our website: [https://athensmade.com/ambassadors/](https://athensmade.com/ambassadors/) or contact Athensmade Executive Director Mary Charles Howard: marycharles@athensmade.com.