

American apparel with European flair

Collin College alumnus opens stores across the U.S.

TRAVIS KERN WILL NEVER forget the day he walked off the airplane and into a unique SoHo, New York City menswear store. His interview at the first Suit Supply store in the U.S. was slated for the next day, but Kern wanted to peruse the new store first. He was impressed with impeccably dressed sales associates, black floors, primary colors, upbeat music and a selection of suits in his hard-to-find size. The manager discovered his identity and within moments he was whisked upstairs for an impromptu interview. Surrounded by 1,000 suits, he was offered an assistant manager position and asked to depart for training in Amsterdam the following day. It was the beginning of a wonderful adventure.

Amsterdam attire

Kern politely told his new boss that he needed a couple of weeks before leaving for a two-month-long training in Amsterdam and ultimately moving to New York. In a fortnight, he was enjoying his rooftop terrace apartment in Leidseplein, a square in the heart of Amsterdam. He began his training in the company's first store.

"I was one of the first four managers on the U.S. team. The Suit Supply concept is Italian fabrics produced vertically. We own our Asian factories and design in-house. There is no middle man. We don't advertise, so you don't see us in *GQ*, but the *Wall Street Journal* ranked us number one for price and quality in a comparison with Armani, J. Crew, Hart Schaffner Marx (President Obama wears this brand), H&M and

Target. Our company is different. The customer does not pay for advertising or a pricey location. One of our New York City stores is in the heart of SoHo, but it is on the second floor in a location off the beaten path," Kern said.

In The Netherlands, Kern was amazed to find that all the suits were tailored while you wait, a service that is also offered in America. Suit Supply has 53 stores worldwide, ranging from Washington, D.C. to Moscow.

After the first month of training, Kern was running an Amsterdam store. When he returned to New York, he added the functions of moving a European-based company to the United States, locating U.S. suppliers, human resources, recruiting and international logistics to his skill set. At 25 years old, he was overseeing three shops including New

York, Chicago and Washington, D.C., and traveling to Holland monthly for meetings and additional training. Today, he is west coast regional manager.

The business tie

Before his job at Suit Supply, Kern earned an associate of applied science degree with a business focus from Collin College and transferred to Texas Tech University where he earned a bachelor of business administration in marketing degree. While attending Collin College, he worked two retail jobs and received a scholarship.

"I couldn't have done it without Collin. The setting is more intimate, and the

professors have had experience in the field. My marketing classes related to my job. The classes required a lot of hard work, which forced me to become disciplined. I was on the dean's and president's lists, and I received a transfer scholarship to Texas Tech because of my grades at Collin. There are too many opportunities not to be successful at Collin. I recommend attending Collin because you meet people from different walks of life, have experienced professors, and the small classroom setting helps you retain information."

Kern stacked his classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays so he could work on the other days. Reducing educational debt was paramount to this alumnus.

"If I graduated from college and had all this debt I would not have had the freedom to go to New York. One of my friends gave me a hard time about attending Collin College and not going immediately to a university, but look where I am now. Collin College offers the best product at an affordable price. I have never had to not do anything because of money. I really enjoyed the path I took."


Perfect fit

While Kern enjoys retail, his true love is building a company. Looking back, he has opened nine of the 12 North American Suit Supply stores including locations in Scottsdale, Denver, Las Vegas and Houston.

"I am dealing with people and processes. It's like your own business. I love finding the right people for the right position. It is like a big puzzle finding the right supplier for the job and seeing it come together. I get a high when it is opening day and the party is over, and I look at the store and think, 'We did it.'"

For Kern, the next adventure is just around the corner, literally. He will be opening a new Suit Supply store in Dallas this November.

"Our CEO wants to open 40 stores in the next six years in the U.S. It is so exciting to be a part of this," Kern said.

For more information about Collin College, visit www.collin.edu. 



Collin College alumnus and west coast regional manager for Suit Supply, Travis Kern is sporting his company's products including a wool knit tie, a chambray shirt, wool/cashmere houndstooth jacket and navy, corduroy, cotton pants.