

PSU supports workers' rights efforts at Knights

By Micah Wintner
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

The minimum wage required by law in the Dominican Republic is \$140 per month, but Knights Apparel pays its workers \$500 per month.

Knights Apparel, which makes it a goal to pay its workers a living wage, has set up a factory in Villa Altigracia, a village in the Dominican Republic, Knights Apparel CEO Joe Bozich said in a teleconference.

"I think the thing that really makes Alta Gracia different is the wages and the benefits," Bozich said. "This can truly be a pathway out of poverty."

Apparel made in the factory is sold under the Alta Gracia brand, named after the town.

Knights Apparel is licensed to produce Penn State merchandise and the Alta Gracia brand is available in the Penn State Bookstore, Penn State Office of Licensing Programs official Robin Spicer wrote in an e-mail.

"We have an obligation to use our business to do more than what is required of us in terms of corporate responsibility."

Joe Bozich
CEO of Knights Apparel



Courtesy of Alta Gracia
A woman works at Alta Gracia, a factory in the Dominican Republic run by Knights Apparel, which produces some Penn State products.

Penn State President Graham Spanier issued a statement in 2009 describing Knights Apparel's initiative to improve workers' rights as a "unique and special opportunity that combines good business practices with humanitarian outreach."

Penn State is committed to promoting the sales of Knights Apparel products, Spanier said in the statement.

Theresa Haas, communications director for the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC), said the WRC considers Alta Gracia "an important step forward in worker's rights."

The WRC is an independent labor rights organization that conducts investigations at collegiate

apparel factories, Haas said.

Alta Gracia products carry a tag showing that the WRC designed the labor standards for the factory where the products were produced, she said.

The Alta Gracia project is risky because Knights Apparel pays its employees three times more than what competitors like Nike and Adidas pay, Bozich said.

Still, his company's venture can still be profitable depending on consumer response, he said.

The factory in Alta Gracia currently employs about 125 workers, Knights Apparel Chief Operating Officer and President Donnie Hodge said in the teleconference. Because so many locals wanted to work at the plant, the hiring

process wasn't easy, he said.

Hodge said Knights Apparel engaged the help of an outside company and the WRC to help make the hiring process as transparent as possible.

Potential employees were put through a series of tests and a questionnaire until the company approved a final list of employees, he said.

Bozich said helping families through his company's factory is the most rewarding thing he's done in his 23 years in the industry.

"We have an obligation to use our business to do more than what is required of us in terms of corporate responsibility," he said.

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