'Garment Workers of South Jersey - Nine Oral Histories,' Published by Stockton University

Book Illuminates WWII Era When Many Women Began Factory Work

For Immediate Release; with photos of Lisa Cox, garment worker interviews on flickr and book cover attached

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Galloway, N.J. - The stories of nine women who worked in South Jersey's garment industry in the late 1930s, '40s and beyond, are captured in a new book published by the Stockton Center on Successful Aging (SCOSA), South Jersey Culture & History Center and Kramer Hall, the university's instructional site which is located in a former shoe and clothing factory in Hammonton, N.J.

"Garment Workers of South Jersey - Nine Oral Histories," illuminates the World War II era, when many women began to work in factories as the men were away, serving in the military. About 6,000 New Jersey workers produced about $38 million worth of military uniforms and civilian clothing annually, including in factories in Vineland, Bridgeton, Mays Landing, Atlantic City and Hammonton, according to the book's introduction.

"My full name is Concetta and they call me Connie," begins Concetta Bailey, who was interviewed by Barbara Edelhauser, who earned her Master's in Social Work from Stockton. "Everybody knew I spent most of my life in what we called a sweatshop, and it was a sweatshop." Her Italian parents moved the family to Hammonton from Philadelphia when she was 10 and she started working in clothing factories when she graduated from high school.

Connie Bailey did "piecework" - in which you were paid for each piece of clothing you completed, instead of an hourly wage. "Let me tell you what I get from Amalgamated Union, a month, for 32 years of work, $35.18. Now, if you were a younger person, just starting college, that would blow your mind," she says.

"I was a working wife. Today they are career women," Bailey relates. "And today the career women go get takeout, whereas the working mother could not afford to get takeout and cooked all the time. My lunch hours were coming home" (and cooking, so dinner could be on the table at a decent hour after work.)

Hers is but one tale. The book grew out of a Master's of Social Work (MSW) program course, "Aging: Advanced Practice" taught by Lisa Cox, professor of Social Work & Gerontology. The course itself had grown out of public interest in a 2014 presentation on the regional garment industry given by Patricia A. Martinelli, author and curator of the Vineland Historical & Antiquarian Society, at Kramer Hall.

Edelhauser was one of nine MSW students who conducted the interviews, under the direction of Lisa Cox, associate professor of Social Work. The other oral histories are from: Sally Cappuccio-Pietrofitta, interviewed by Blyss Bowman; Lucy Curcio, by Stefani Pelly; Evelyn Kanjarski, by Hok Yee Chau; Susan Fognano, by Janeen Wilson; Franca Fiore Gherardi, by Lesya Popil; Anne Liberto, by Dana Ciechanowski and Mary Scarduzio, by Brittany Mallinger. The late Gertrude Presti's story was told to Tatyana Duffy by Presti's daughter, Joanna Conn.

"There's always something magical when learning evolves from intergenerational connections," Cox said. "It was a neat image for our students to see older adults age so successfully into their 80s and 90s and have such wonderful values."

Cox and Martinelli are the book's primary editors, with help from Stockton's Christina Birchler, Kristina Boyer and Tom Kinsella, director of the South Jersey Culture and History Center, who oversaw production. The cover, featuring an old factory photo used by permission of Gabe Donio of the Hammonton Gazette, was designed by Stockton graphics artist Heidi Hartley.

"Garment Workers of South Jersey - Nine Oral Histories," is available on Amazon.

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Captions for photos of the interviewees and students on flickr; those photos by Ginna Petrillo/Stockton University

Photo of book cover attached.