

A 12-year-old business, that specializes in organic and sustainable “safe” fabric, is carrying on a family tradition launched 100 years ago by Votes for Women activist Edna Kearns!



IT RUNS IN THE FAMILY

“We’re celebrating the centennial of a campaign my great-grandmother Edna began when she linked winning votes for women to improving education in support of better parenting,” said Tara Bloyd, the mother of a preterm infant born 15 years ago that led to her co-founding the business NearSea Naturals (www.nearseanaturals.com) in 2001 that specializes in organic and other safe fabrics.

“Many people learn about organics when a baby comes into the family. It isn’t long before they move completely to organics -- from food to fabric. And then they’re using organic products on a regular basis for their growing child and general family needs.”

There were no organic clothes for preemies 15 years ago

Bloyd continued: “When my son Neil was born prematurely, my husband and I had to learn quickly. My mother Winifred Culp and I dusted off our sewing machines and started sewing with organic fabric to clothe baby Neil. We needed clothes to fit a preemie, as well as to meet our other needs, including diapers, sheets, towels, and other items.

“When other people noticed our progress, they wanted safe organic and sustainable fabrics too. Often we tell people the story of

how our baby boy birthed a green business.”

Over the years NearSea Naturals’ business expanded rapidly to serve a diverse customer base including designers, small business owners, and sewing enthusiasts of all kinds.

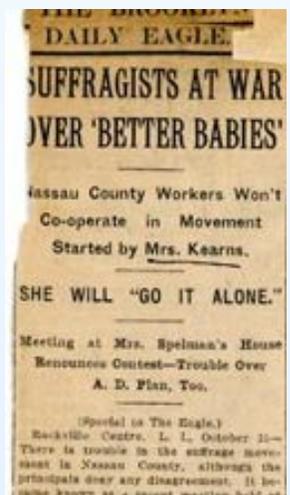
One hundred years ago, in 1913, suffragist Edna Buckman Kearns hit the suffrage movement’s campaign trail driving her horse-drawn campaign wagon that’s now in the collection of the New York State Museum in Albany, NY. The campaign wagon has been exhibited as recently as 2010 at the state museum and in 2012 as part of the Governor’s exhibit at the New York State Capitol.

Edna Kearns’ descendants –two granddaughters and a great-granddaughter-- carry forward Edna’s work of supporting the concerns of families. One granddaughter, Marguerite Kearns, has published a web site since 2009 featuring the suffrage work of Edna Kearns, as well as news and stories of the suffrage or Votes for Women movement (www.suffragewagon.org)

This year Winifred Culp is taking the family tradition of activism one step further by announcing the creation of a not-for-profit corporation, SAFE Fabric,



None of this activity about concern for babies is in isolation because it can be traced back to Grandmother Edna Kearns 100 years ago



that focuses on education for safe fabrics and job training as a way to revive the textile industry in the United States.

“Consumers are more aware than they have ever been about health and safety issues related to the products they purchase,” explains Winifred Culp. She has been a driving force behind NearSea’s effort to bring more jobs back to the U.S. mainland and support U.S. made operations “from field to fabric.”

Winifred Culp, the granddaughter of Edna Buckman Kearns, grew up hearing the stories of her grandmother’s efforts to bring to public attention the perspective that women and especially mothers should participate in the democratic process.

“During the summer, my mother got us five children dressed up and we sat in Grandmother Edna’s suffrage wagon for our yearly photograph. That was my education about the suffrage movement and that’s when I learned that it took women 72 years to win the vote. It wasn’t until years later that I found out what the word ‘suffrage’ meant.

“My grandmother’s point of view shouldn’t have been controversial back in 1913 when women still hadn’t won the vote. However, Grandmother Edna’s ‘Better Babies’ campaign caused friction between those suffrage activists who wanted to limit their organizing only to the vote and those who believed that all social issues were related and couldn’t be isolated,” Culp continued.

Edna Buckman Kearns advocated for women and their families as far back as 1912 when she worked as an editor of suffrage news for the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. Her 1913 articles and editorials about linking the vote to a “Better Babies” campaign split the grassroots movement on Long Island, NY. Some suffrage activists chose to isolate the vote and work solely on that issue, and some suffrage activists like Kearns viewed the franchise as linked to numerous family-related issues.



The suffrage campaign wagon, the “Spirit of 1776,” now in the collection of the New York State Museum.

Noted Tara Bloyd: “My great-grandmother Edna wasn’t simply interested in the vote. She had vision and vowed to address varied social concerns with her Better Babies campaign. Many opponents of the suffrage movement claimed that women voters would neglect their children. And who would have predicted that Edna’s education campaign about better mothering would cause disagreements and become so newsworthy!”

Winifred Culp concluded: “People today are faced with decisions about supporting single issues versus working alongside others in coalitions in a way that advances our responsibility to provide a safe and sustainable world for future generations. We’re proud to be carrying on a family tradition of finding new ways to bring people together and share safe life choices with others. Safe fabric advocacy is one way to do this.”

PHOTOS: Page 5. Left to Right: Winifred Culp and her grandchildren Theodore and Neil. Right photo: Edna Buckman Kearns and article from the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* of fall/winter 1913.



IN OUR NEXT ISSUE OF
SAFE FABRIC JOURNAL
we follow Texas organic cotton
from the field to the fabric