

## Apparel Line Joins Coolaid the Clown

### **Krumper and clothier are raising awareness about social issues**

*By Reed Trachy, University of Washington News Lab*

They are two voices working together to inspire change, from a small town in Oregon to Los Angeles County – both areas living with violence and gang warfare.

It is exactly those types of problems that Break the Chain Apparel and Coolaid the Clown are fighting to address. Their partnership is unusual, but their message the same.

“I love the fact that we’re probably the most unlikely team you’d ever meet,” said Tammi Burns, the founder of Break the Chain Apparel.

To Burns, a survivor of domestic abuse, starting Break the Chain was a no-brainer. She saw it as a way to avoid throwing messages at people and instead involve them – using “human billboards.”

“It’s as simple as putting on a T-shirt,” she said. “Why not make a difference by simply getting dressed?”

Stanley Alexander, better known as Coolaid the Clown, grew up in Inglewood, in southern Los Angeles County, and now runs a buck-dance studio to help keep kids off the streets.

Buck dancing, as Coolaid describes it, is a great outlet for the kids to release their anger and aggression.

“I tell them, you really want to fight someone? Instead you should fight with us: buck dance.”

Though he resides and mentors in Hawthorne, which Coolaid described as “kind of” the hood, he and his crew perform at events and birthday parties in Compton and some other projects in the Los Angeles area. The performances enable him to bring the movement to some of the communities that need them most.

“A lot of kids are taking the same path that I did and they think it’s cool,” he said. “I’m trying to let them know that ‘cool’ is hitting the stage.”

Though krump and hip-hop are some of the primary forms of dance associated with buck dancing, they are not necessarily the only ones.

“Buck dancing means that we go buck-wild,” Coolaid said. “There isn’t any one style – we draw from several different types of dance.”

It was through Laurena Campos, an independent publicist, that the partnership between Break the Chain, Coolaid and fellow krumping mentor Tommy the Clown was formed. A fan of krumping and buck-dancing, she discovered Coolaid and Tommy through MySpace. She began communicating with them and eventually offered to donate some T-shirts.

Now the shirts are being used at most of Coolaid's performances. The slogan, "Don't Bang, Just Buck," has become a defining statement for what his movement is all about. Plus, he said that he and his crew absolutely love them.

As for Burns, the decision to donate the shirts was an easy one. It was both a great opportunity to promote and also to support one of the causes on which Break the Chain Apparel was founded.

"I only had to think about it for a few seconds," Burns said. "It was a fairly expensive project, but it was also so important. It's an honor to work with him and have his kids wearing the T-shirts."

The clothing line has also led to a new nation-wide project called "Project Change Reaction." It enables students to design artwork and write a slogan around a social issue of their choosing. The slogan and artwork are then printed on T-shirts and sent to the schools where students can sell them to raise money and awareness.

Burns works another job full-time to help support Break the Chain. However, that alone isn't keeping the company afloat. Campos mentioned that a lot of the financial support has come from sponsorships from businesses in the Salem area.

"The local businesses are realizing that small contributions can have a very positive effect on their communities," she said.

Campos spent a day with both Tommy and Coolaid. Needless to say, the experience had a major impact on her.

"I can't express enough how amazing these men are," she said. "What they're doing is so much bigger than most people could ever imagine. They truly are angels for their communities."

As for where Break the Chain Apparel will be in four years, the company has already started to see some returns from its work with schools, local businesses and through press exposure – as well as from sales via their Web site and local shops in the Salem area.

“You have to clean up your own backyard before you take on any more,” she said. “It’s important have a plan, start small, and then move forward.”