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EMILY NICHOL/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

FAMILY BUSINESS: Roger Leavy is president of Tassel Depot, his wife April serves as vice president and their dog Brandi models their product. They make their tassels from brightly-colored rayon, silk and polyester threads.

HATS
OFF
FOR

TASSELS

TASSEL DEPOT HAS BEEN PULLING THE STRINGS IN THE TRIMMINGS INDUSTRY FOR MORE THAN 100 YEARS

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Type the word "tassels" into Google and the first result that pops up is Tassel Depot, with its catchy *Tassels Without Hassles* slogan.

The company has been operating in Deerfield Beach for the past 17 years — with Roger Leavy and his wife April pulling all the strings — and it was in business long before there were search engines or an Internet.

Formerly known as Hofmann & Leavy, the tassel manufacturer has been operating since 1864 and is pretty much one of a kind. It recently changed its name to Tassel Depot as part of an image makeover that includes launching a new, more interactive website.

Tassel Depot, which rings up sales of about \$3 million a year, makes the hanging ornaments — in other words, tassels — used on clothing, curtains, and other articles, most

notably graduation mortarboards.

Tassel technology is simple. Tassels are made by laying cords or threads of even length parallel and then fastening the bunch at one end.

The company has New York roots but moved to South Florida in 1989. Since then Tassel Depot has continued to make apparel trimmings, cords, and millions of tassels a year.

In the company's manufacturing

•TURN TO TASSELS, 56

These items dangle in thin air

*TASSELS, FROM 40

facility located at 3251 SW 13th Dr. in Deerfield Beach, machines braid strands from spools of brightly-colored rayon, silk and polyester thread. The factory is also a warehouse and shipping point that connects the company to the rest of the world — since operations have gone global.

"South Florida is logistically well-located," Roger Leavy said. "We utilize all modes of transportation and always deliver on time. That's important for customer satisfaction and our clients recognize that."

Tassel Depot has a large distributorship in the United Kingdom and is setting up one in Australia. The company also runs a factory in Kingston, Jamaica, where most of the handmade work takes place. "We make our own cord and the tassels are made by hand," Leavy said.

But he said outsourcing by manufacturers in general doesn't make it easier to compete with a powerhouse like China. "I still keep this factory in the U.S. and give my employees healthcare. In China, what do they have? It's hard," Leavy said.

Still, Tassel Depot has managed to thrive in its niche market, providing tassels for major graduation cap and gown companies around the country. According to Leavy, the company provides close to 60 percent of tassels used on mortarboards in the United States.

Its biggest client is Oak Hall Cap & Gown in Salem, Va. Tassel Depot and the company have done business for at least 20 years.

Oak Hall sells graduation gowns and caps with tassels to 1,600 colleges and universities, including Florida International University and Nova Southeastern.

"Tassel Depot produces a very high-quality product," said Joe D'Angelo, Oak Hall's owner and executive vice president. "We order tassels from them all year round."

The graduation tassels come in a variety of colors and are made well in advance. For ease of handling, they are kept in boxes organized by year along with the shiny metal year plates — 2008, 2010 — that dangle with the tassel strings.

Tassel Depot products also decorate menus, gift packages, invitations and book-



EMILY NICHOL/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

SPOOL FED: Employee Carlos Parodi refills empty spools of burgundy yarn from a 1920's cord machine.



EMILY NICHOL/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

TASSEL HUSTLE: Maria Garcia makes tassels from blue yarn at Tassel Depot's Deerfield Beach factory.

marks. And the company's tassels and elastic bands are found on menus on major cruise ships.

Its tassels also were requested for formal invitations commissioned by the U.S. government, including those made for the inaugural ball of President George Bush in 1989, and the invitations for the 1994 funeral of former

President Richard Nixon.

The company traces its beginnings to New York City in the 1800s. The trimmings company was started in 1864 by two German immigrants under the name Hofmann & Ellrodt and became very popular in Manhattan.

Ellrodt left the company around 1909. In 1921, Edward Leavy, Roger Leavy's grandfather, joined the company as a salesman. After Hofmann died in 1929, his family decided to sell the company to Edward Leavy.

The name was then changed to Hofmann & Leavy. In 1942, after serving in World War II, Roger's father, Jack Leavy, joined the company.

In 1978, Roger Leavy officially took the reins of the family business, and his wife April, who has a background in fashion design, joined full-time as vice president in 1996.

"I started going to the factory when I was eight," said Leavy as he walked the 11,000-square-foot factory and warehouse in Deerfield Beach. "I even was a delivery boy around Manhattan. Now we supply big businesses and mom-and-pop operations all over the world."

HOFMANN & LEAVY • SINCE 1864

TASSEL DEPOT
Tassels Without Hassles!

