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MAYOR LIGHTFOOT ANNOUNCES LOCAL BUSINESSES SELECTED TO PROVIDE ONE MILLION REUSABLE CLOTH MASKS FOR CHICAGO RESIDENTS

Four Chicagoland businesses to produce, source and provide reusable cloth masks that will be distributed to Aldermanic offices and through City's Racial Equity Rapid Response Team

CHICAGO – Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot today announced four diverse local businesses have been selected to produce, source and provide one million reusable cloth masks that will be distributed across Chicago to further protect city residents, especially our most vulnerable populations, from the spread of the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Building upon Mayor Lightfoot's robust public health response to this pandemic while also supporting local businesses during this difficult time, the City has entered into agreements with Barbara Bates Designs, G.A.I.A.U. Product Design & Development Ltd., Silk Screen Express and The Will Group to create a total of 250,000 reusable cloth masks that will be distributed to Aldermanic offices and another 750,000 reusable cloth masks to be provided through the City's Racial Equity Rapid Response Team.

"While the COVID-19 crisis has been hard on every resident in this city, it has also shown the impact we all have on each other—strangers and friends alike. Whether it's fashion designers that have altered their production to create cloth masks or manufacturing companies that have shifted their operations to source and distribute face coverings, these companies are a testament to what it looks like when our communities and cities respond to a crisis in unison," said Mayor Lightfoot. "Each of these one million cloth masks coupled with the thousands that individuals have donated themselves represents the generosity, compassion and true spirit resiliency of Chicago."

Over the past week, the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) thoroughly reviewed each of the local businesses' proposed masks to ensure they meet national safety standards. Based on their proposed product samples, production schedules and pricing, the following four vendors were selected to produce masks:

- **Barbara Bates Designs:** Located on Chicago's Near South Side, Bates Designs has been a dynamic leader in the fashion industry since its founding in 1986. Led by designer Barbara Bates, the African American woman-owned company is originally known for dressing celebrities and entertainers until production shifted over the last months to create reusable cloth masks for healthcare workers on the frontlines of the COVID-19 fight.



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- **Jermikko of G.A.I.A.U. Product Design & Development Ltd.:** Located in the New Eastside of Chicago, the company is run by Chicago-based fashion designer and manufacturer, Jermikko Shoshanna. Four decades ago, Jermikko emerged as one of the first African American, female-owned design and clothing manufacturers in Illinois, selling to top retailers nationwide. Since the start of the COVID-19 crisis, Jermikko has utilized her talent and workforce to create cloth masks for Chicago's residents with a concentration on the less fortunate and advising other designers on how to set up their custom studios to create for mass production.
- **Silk Screen Express:** Founded by Dawn Armijo-Coleman in 1992 in Tinley Park, Illinois, the WBE-certified company produces more than 100,000 different screen-printed products, embroidered apparel and promotional items for businesses, universities, local, state and federal government.
- **The Electrical Resource Management – The Will Group (TWG):** The African American and family-owned and operated electrical product and service provider has been located in Chicago's Austin neighborhood since 2008 with plans for expansion to North Lawndale in Fall of 2020. The Will Group consists of several separate and distinct companies that are prominent within the lighting and electrical industry, including Electrical Resource Management (ERM) which has now dedicated its workforce- composed of 81% minorities or women - to sourcing and distributing cloth masks.

"We are proud to be able to support our strategic partners by providing cloth masks during this pandemic. On top of this effort, we have been able to provide bonuses of over \$50,000 for our essential workers while also donating additional masks, sanitizer, disinfectant, gloves, and more to those in need," said Joshua Davis of The Will Group. "Our organization is passionate about creating opportunities in the communities in which we operate and are grateful for Mayor Lightfoot's commitment to the City of Chicago and its citizens."

"I'm thrilled to be able to have been recognized as a contributor to making masks for the citizens of Chicago – a world-class city," said Barbara Bates, founder of Bates Designs.

The City's emergency contracts with the four vendors provide one million masks for up \$2.2 million. Beginning today, the four local businesses will start production to create or source the cloth masks for Chicago residents, which will build on the City's existing stockpile of masks and additional protective equipment.

"We are all facing an uncommon threat from an uncommon enemy; an enemy none of us can see and but is everywhere, all around us. To meet and defeat it will take an uncommon effort during an uncommon time," said Jermikko Shoshanna of G.A.I.A.U. Product Design & Development Ltd. "But the greater common cause is for the safety and wellbeing of our citizens, our city and our way of life. Mayor Lightfoot and Governor Pritzker are both asking the common people of this city and this state – the everyday person in every community – to meet this challenge together. I feel both pride and duty, for having been chosen to help us do what we know we must do, all of us — together. Thank God and thank you."



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“Silk Screen Express, Inc. is proud to partner with Mayor Lori Lightfoot to protect the citizens of Chicago,” said Dawn Coleman, President of Silk Screen Express Inc. “We are honored to be providing cloth masks to be distributed to the City’s most high risk and vulnerable residents.”

In addition to the distribution of masks to each of the City’s 50 Aldermanic offices, next week Mayor Lightfoot’s Racial Equity Rapid Response Team will begin giving out 750,000 cloth masks to Chicago’s most disproportionately impacted neighborhoods, as part of an effort to build greater equity in health outcomes in Chicago’s black and brown communities. By leveraging the Racial Equity Rapid Response Team to minimize gaps in accessibility to cloth masks and face coverings while also educating targeted and vulnerable populations in Chicago, this latest measure builds on Mayor Lightfoot’s commitment to addressing the health inequities highlighted by the COVID-19 crisis.

“Our efforts are lasered focused on addressing the unacceptable, disproportionate impact COVID-19 has had on our city’s African American and Latinx community,” said Candace Moore, the City’s first Chief Equity Officer and leader of the City’s Racial Equity Rapid Response Team. “With these new cloth masks, we will focus on working with our community partners to ensure that our most vulnerable residents have access to resources they need to stay safe.”

Building on the one million cloth masks being provided by Chicagoland businesses, individual residents and organizations have stepped up to donate more than 5,000 homemade cloth masks to the City’s ["Chicago Together! Make a Mask, Give a Mask, Wear a Mask"](#) citywide cloth mask drive. Launched last month, the donated cloth masks are being provided to homeless shelters, community health clinics, treatment providers, social service providers, group homes and long-term care facilities to prevent outbreaks among the City’s most high-risk and vulnerable residents.

“We are in awe of the ingenuity of Chicagoans. These vendors stepped up and changed their production and operations to make or source cloth masks because that was the need,” said CDPH Commissioner Allison Arwady, M.D. “I want to thank them for their quick action. Studies show that masks and face coverings can help prevent those who are COVID-19 positive from spreading the virus.”

Last week, Governor Pritzker’s modified Stay at Home order took effect, which requires all Chicago residents and visitors over the age of two and for whom wearing a face covering is medically feasible to wear a face covering or a cloth mask when in a public place where they can’t maintain a six-foot social distance. The use of the cloth masks and face coverings is meant to help prevent people who have the virus and may not know it from transmitting it to others.

CDPH encourages all residents to use cloth masks and save medical masks, including N95 respirators and surgical masks, for healthcare workers and first responders on the frontline of the COVID-19 crisis. For the latest information and public health guidance to prevent the spread of COVID-19, please visit [Chicago.gov/COVID](https://www.chicago.gov/COVID).



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