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Loom and Spindle

The Mill Museum Newsletter

April 2024

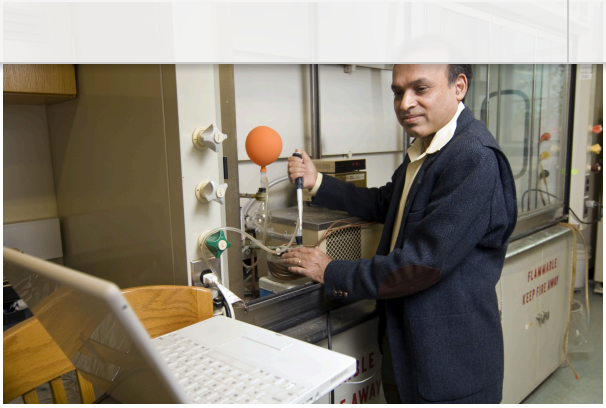
UConn Chemist to Explain How Recycled Textiles Can Produce Plastic Alternatives

Challa Kumar, an emeritus professor of chemistry at the University of Connecticut, is scheduled to speak at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, May 15 at the Mill Museum on his discoveries related to discarded cloths.

Professor Kumar will explain how recycled textiles and proteins can be used to produce an alternative to plastic.

The research is critical given the widespread pollution that is generated by certain kinds of fabrics, as well as plastics.

Under some estimates, 400 million tons of plastic waste are generated worldwide. An additional 92 million tons of cloth waste is generated annually.



Challa Kumar (Image: UConn)

"Plastics are polluting our world and their manufacturing [is] releasing vast amounts of carbon dioxide," Kumar warned.

"To mitigate these issues, we are developing protein-based plastics that are green, sustainable, and completely biodegradable or compostable," he said. "Our invention also uses waste textiles and recycles them as useful plastic replacement products."

> *" The research is critical given the widespread pollution that is generated by certain kinds of fabrics, as well as plastics. "*

The process will result in high-quality products that do not endanger human health or the health of the planet, but still compete with fossil-fuel-based plastics, he added.

"Textile waste is growing rapidly due to the fast-changing fashion industry and lack of adequate recycling," according to Kumar. "This inexpensive material can be recycled to make useful products to replace conventional plastics, which is a huge step for conserving resources on the planet."

He says that protein-based plastics and those that are reinforced with waste textile fibers can be excellent alternatives to conventional plastics.

Protein-based plastics also provide a path forward to lower emissions by using proteins derived from plants, crops, and agricultural waste.

"Thus, while not competing with the food chain, we can find alternatives while also using waste textiles to make innovative solutions and promote a sustainable bioeconomy," Kumar said.

Currently, the plastics industry is one of the major contributors to the rapid warming of the planet. Warming is due to increasing levels of carbon dioxide

and other greenhouse gases.

His research has led UConn's Technology Commercialization Services (TCS) to file two patents to protect the invention and its technology. The team is currently in discussions with several industrial partners to commercialize the products.

The lecture is free and open to all.

Mill Museum Declares 2024 as 'Year of Touch' to Improve Experiences for the Disabled

In a continuing effort to provide more meaningful visits to those with visual or other disabilities, the Mill Museum board recently backed making 2024 the "Year of Touch."

Spearheaded by museum Curatorial, Exhibits, and Education (CEE) Committee member Elanah Sherman, the initiative will lead to increased tactile experiences for museum visitors with disabilities who need increased accessibility to exhibits and other activities.

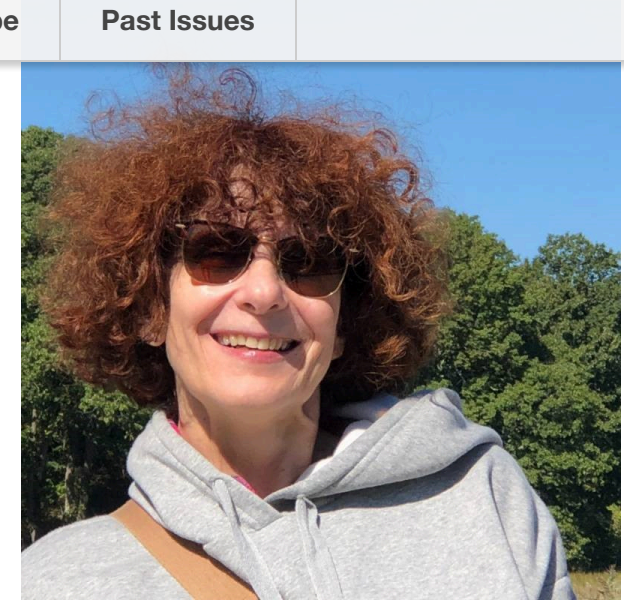
> *" Sometimes, museums are reluctant to provide the disabled and others the chance to touch an exhibit. But with precautions and artifact screening, this doesn't need to be a worry. "*

"Too often, accessibility efforts for people with disabilities are limited to structural enhancements that enable access for people with mobility disabilities," Sherman explained in a recent statement.

"But the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) covers people with many kinds of disabilities, including visual. In this connection, museums, especially, often forget that access to their programs and services includes making exhibits as accessible as possible by different methods."

Elanah Sherman (Image: Connecticut Land Conservation Council).

One approach is having many tactile experiences for visitors.



Sometimes, museums are reluctant to provide the disabled and others the chance to touch an exhibit. But with precautions and artifact screening, this doesn't need to be a worry.

So far this year, the museum has provided varied tactile experiences thanks to Sherman working alongside museum Senior Curator Jamie Eves, who is also Windham Town Historian. Another CEE Committee member, weaver Peggy Church, who also teaches classes at the museum, has played a key role by providing fabric swatches to illustrate different weaving techniques.

In the future, the museum plans to consult with educational and advocacy organizations to further develop initiatives. The many artifacts in the collection will be screened and pieces will be selected for appropriateness. Also, the museum hopes to develop a touch protocol for guest exhibitors. And the public will be kept informed about the programs.

In addition, the museum may open up much of the touch experience even to those without disabilities to create a more comprehensive and meaningful visit for all guests.

The long-term goal of the Mill Museum's Year of Touch is to have tactile experiences so firmly embedded that every year will be a year of touch for the museum, according to Sherman.

She has an extensive background on issues related to disabilities. Often, Sherman consults on the topic for organizations. Sherman also has been involved in the disability rights movement for decades. Sherman has been a Project Director of the Americans with

" The museum's initiative is in accord with Title III of the groundbreaking ADA law which was signed into law by President

Disabilities Act (ADA) Coalition of Connecticut, and an advocate at the former Connecticut Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities. She also was chair of the Norwich Commission on Persons with Disabilities.

George H.W. Bush in 1990."

With her assistance, the museum has been gradually improving accessibility for disabled visitors over the last couple of years. This included ADA training for staff; a structural accessibility survey; a comprehensive accessibility statement; and related improvements in the museum complex.

The museum's initiative is in accord with Title III of the groundbreaking ADA law which was signed into law by President George H.W. Bush in 1990.



Local Israel Putnam biographer Michael Westerfield and Windham Theatre Guild actor Kenneth Noll, an emeritus UConn professor, enthralled dozens of audience members in a recent Mill Museum presentation on the American Revolutionary War hero. The program was called “Rebels of the Revolution: Connecticut’s Israel Putnam.” (Image: Amy Marwood)

News Briefs

Time To Renew Membership

It's time for existing members to renew or increase their yearly membership at The Mill Museum, formally known as the Windham Textile & History Museum.

It's also the right time for others who want to join to sign up.

There are different levels of support all of which benefit an important resource for the region.

- At the Individual level $25 (Cotton), members will regularly receive a regular newsletter; email notice of programs and events; free admission to library and exhibits (special events and fundraisers may be extra); and one hour of specialized staff time for personal research.
- At the Family level $50 (Wool), members are given all the same benefits as the individual members, but they extend to a household consisting of up to two adults and any number of children.
- At the Patron level $100 (Silk), members will get all the above benefits, plus invitations to private, advance showing of exhibits; free personal tours; and three hours of specialized staff time for personal research.

To sign up for or renew your membership either click HERE or send a check and indicate membership level to the

Windham Textile & History Museum
411 Main Street, Willimantic, CT 06226. Please make checks out to: WTHM.

Located in the historic former headquarters of the American Thread Company, The Mill Museum houses a museum, historical society, library, and archive. Through its exhibits, lectures, programs, activities, and collections, the museum preserves and interprets the history of textiles, the textile industry, and textile communities in Connecticut.

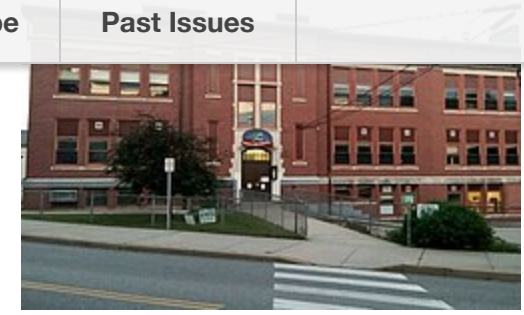
We encourage those from the entire Eastern Connecticut region and beyond to join the museum. Please join or renew today.

Natchaug School Honored

A few hundred people recently celebrated Willimantic's Natchaug School receiving the Elementary School of the Year award from the Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS).

Natchaug Principal Jeannine Enamait led a celebratory of parade. Staff, faculty, students, parents, and community members marched through local

streets, ending up at Jillson Square.



Known for its diverse staff and students, Natchaug has “unwavering commitment to excellence in education and its dedication to fostering a vibrant, inclusive learning environment,” according to an online statement.

Natchaug students are frequent visitors to the exhibits at the Mill Museum.

Native American Life in Lebanon

Connecticut State Archaeologist Sarah Sportman is scheduled to speak on Sunday May 5 at the Lebanon Historical Society on “Native American Life in Lebanon.”

Sportman has a doctorate in anthropology from UConn. She has been the state’s official archeologist since 2020.

The lecture is planned to follow the 4 pm members’ annual meeting.

The program is free and open to the public.

Get Woven into the Fabric of Our Museum

You don't have to live in Willimantic or Windham to support the Mill Museum. We're a REGIONAL museum, so folks throughout eastern Connecticut and beyond can learn about the vital role the mills and the people who worked in them played in shaping the area's history. If you've already become a member, THANK YOU! If not, please consider joining our ranks.

At the $25 COTTON (Individual) level, members receive the newsletter; email notice of the Museum's programs and events; free admission to the Museum, its library and exhibits (special events and fundraisers my be extra); and 1-hour access to staff time for personal research.

At the $50 WOOL (Family) level, membership extends these same benefits to members of a household consisting of up to two adults and any number of children.

At the $100 SILK (Patron) level, membership includes all the above benefits, plus

invitations to a private, advance showing of exhibits; free personal tours; and 3-hour access to staff time for personal research.

Membership Levels:

Cotton (individual) membership, $25
Wool (family) membership, $50
Silk (patron) membership, $100

Windham Textile & History Museum
411 Main Street, Willimantic, CT 06226
Make checks out to: WTHM

Go to https://millmuseum.org/join-membership/ and join today or increase your level of membership. Your involvement may be one more thread in a growing tapestry of history.

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860-456-2178 * 411 Main Street, Willimantic, CT 06226
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