

Meijer Partners with Michigan Businesses to Address Home Fitness Demand

Retailer shortens supply chain as local businesses source, design and manufacture hard-to-find hand weights

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GRAND RAPIDS, Mich., Jan. 26, 2021 /PRNewswire/ -- When fitness equipment like kettlebells, hand weights and dumbbells became hot sellers at the start of the pandemic, Midwestern retailer Meijer created a Michigan-made solution to bolster supply and address the more than 300 percent increase of demand its stores were seeing as shoppers enhanced their home gyms.

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That solution is making a difference as shoppers at Meijer stores across the Midwest are better able to find hand weights and fitness products to help them stick to their New Year's resolutions.

"Millions of people were suddenly staying at home and looking for ways to exercise, creating a demand that all retailers were trying to address," said Scott Schuette, Team Sports and Fitness Buyer for Meijer. "We realized finding the right partners locally was key to shortening our supply chain and help customers find all the accessories needed for their home gym solutions."

Schuette began calling local foundries in the state with the capabilities and found Great Lakes Castings in Ludington as the perfect candidate to manufacture hand weights for its *Meijer Active* brand. Planning with the 75-year-old company began in the Spring and they were quickly able to engineer 3D mold patterns, source local materials and begin the process of pouring test designs at its Northern Michigan foundry.

By August, the partnership added Grand Haven Power Coating to the finishing process and piloted a program at 14 Grand Rapids-area stores. The entire stock of more than 500 cast iron hand weights sold out in 10 days. The decision to fast-track the program - as gyms in most states struggled to stay open due to ongoing pandemic surges – enabled Great Lakes Casting and Grand Haven Power Coating to expand to three shifts to achieve the production schedule for steadily increasing distribution of *Meijer Active* hand weights to more stores in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky and Wisconsin.

"This partnership has created a new way for us to pursue opportunities as we enhance our capabilities to fit the reshoring needs of businesses that traditionally work with countries outside the United States," Great Lakes Castings' President & CEO Rob Killips said. "The average consumer would not recognize where our castings are used, so we are incredibly proud to step up and manufacture a product that so many people can use."

Killips says the "Made in Michigan" extension includes product sourcing of all sand used for the molds, which comes from a processing plant in Muskegon, while all the steel poured for the *Meijer Active* hand weights comes from various regional scrap suppliers. The Great Lakes Casting company is also one of the first foundries in the United States to utilize recycled product and re-use its sand in a continued Green effort to reduce waste streams.

In addition to yoga mats, resistance bands, exercise straps, medicine balls, and whole array of fitness items that saw unprecedented growth last year, the complete line of *Meijer Active* hand weights is now available at

Meijer supercenters in 10-, 15-, 20- and 25-pound versions and are expected to continue to be hot sellers. In 2020, the retailer sold nearly 1.5 million pieces of fitness accessories.

"Our teams worked tirelessly to create an incredibly short supply chain and that is starting to make a real difference in keeping shelves stocked with fitness equipment," Schuette said. "This is just another example of how being a good neighbor and seeking local partnerships can benefit communities throughout the Midwest, making Michigan a better place to work, live and - in this case - exercise."

About Meijer: Meijer is a Grand Rapids, Mich.-based retailer that operates 256 supercenters and grocery stores throughout Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky and Wisconsin. A privately-owned and family-operated company since 1934, Meijer pioneered the "one-stop shopping" concept and has evolved through the years to include expanded fresh produce and meat departments, as well as pharmacies, comprehensive apparel departments, pet departments, garden centers, toys and electronics. For additional information on Meijer, please visit www.meijer.com. Follow Meijer on Twitter [@twitter.com/Meijer](https://twitter.com/Meijer) and [@twitter.com/MeijerPR](https://twitter.com/MeijerPR) or become a fan at www.facebook.com/meijer.

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