

# Clothing designer doesn't aim for the fences, he forgets them

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SPRINGFIELD – It started as an inside joke. Western New England College (WNEC) senior Mike Beck, of Whitesboro, N.Y., and a fellow baseball player were in the outfield, talking about hitting the long ball and running through fences to catch balls that should have been home runs.

“Forget fences,” they joked.

The phrase stayed in Beck's head, however, and soon the marketing major found himself doodling logos in his notebooks, incorporating the idea of “forgetting fences” into his impromptu artwork.

“The fifth or sixth design was the final one,” Beck explained. “Once I had that, I thought, ‘I gotta make T-shirts now!’” That is how Beck's Forget Fences clothing line was created.

The first shirts were created by spray painting the logo onto T-shirts using a cardboard stencil. Beck said his entrepreneurial spirit is what pushed him to try to do things better. He moved from spray painting shirts to having them screen printed, and now he's looking for the next step.

“It's everybody's dream to be a professional something,” Beck told *Reminder Publications*. “You just gotta go for it, you gotta get out there and try.”

The native Upstate New Yorker came to WNEC to play baseball and major in engineering, but changed his major in his freshman year.

“I enjoyed the baseball program here and wanted to stay at WNEC, but I was kind of stinky at calculus and I didn't enjoy getting bad grades,” Beck said. “I always enjoyed the design and innovation part [of engineering], not the math part.” That's why he switched to marketing.

He rolled his love of America's pastime and design into one with Forget Fences. What started as purely a baseball reference has evolved into something else.

“Forget Fences started out as a baseball thing; hitting over and running through fences,” the information on the budding company's Facebook page states. “Then it evolved into a way of life. A symbol of overcoming physical, mental and emotional obstacles.”



“What does [the phrase] mean to you?” Beck asked. “You can apply it to a lot more than a baseball field.”

He said he wants to take Forget Fences to the next level after his graduation from WNEC in May, but he is realistic about how profitable his clothing company will be right off the bat.

“I have huge college loans to pay,” he laughed. “I think I'll get a regular job and work on Forget Fences from 5 [p.m.] to midnight.”

Luckily, he won't be working his late hours alone. Beck's friend since middle school, André Short, recently came on as his partner in Forget Fences.

“I signed on to be Mike's partner because

of Mike. He is the kind of guy that has so much creative energy that no matter what he does it is always great to be a part of it,” Short said. “This company started out as an idea, a small project, and then grew rapidly. I have seen what Mike has done with other projects and am always impressed.”

Short continued, “Forget Fences is unique in several ways. Mike has created this company to fill a void in sports apparel. As he has asked me in the past: ‘Where can you find a baseball T-shirt that doesn't have a team name or Nike, Adidas, etc. on it?’ You simply can't. There is also little to no apparel in the sporting world that is also fashionable. That is where I come in. Mike is the sports expert, having loved baseball for his entire life, and I bring the more fashionable components to the design.”

“There's cool skateboarding and snowboarding gear, like the stuff at PacSun,” Beck said. “Why not have cool fashion like that for baseball?”

Beck's love of baseball and entrepreneurial spirit earned him recognition by the Harold Grinspoon Charitable Foundation's Entrepreneurship Initiative. He, along with a number of other young entrepreneurs, will be honored at the foundation's annual banquet on April 29 at the Log Cabin in Holyoke.

“It's pretty amazing to be honored by the Grinspoon Foundation,” Beck said. He was nominated by marketing professor James McKeon while Forget Fences was still at the concept level.

Being honored by the foundation has served as a catalyst for Beck.

“It gave me that push,” he explained. “It let me know that people notice [what I'm doing] and that people care. You need that boost to help you keep going when your project is so small.”

Beck's aiming to forget fences with his small business, though.

“I want to be the best,” he stated.

For more information on Forget Fences, join its Facebook group or log on to [www.forgetfences.com](http://www.forgetfences.com).



Mike Beck