

The 120-year-old company has faced tough times in the past years, as jobs have disappeared from its core customer base.

Sales are down about 5 percent this year, Ferraro said.

Carhartt's 2008 revenue was listed in *Crain's Private 100* at \$530 million, flat with the revenue it reported in 2007 and up from \$500 million in 2006. The company had 4,500 employees in 2007.

Today, Ferraro said, the company employs about 3,500 worldwide, including its Dearborn headquarters and manufacturing facilities in Tennessee and Kentucky.

"We're the brand of the working class, and when folks are working, they're not buying new jeans or a new jacket," she said.

Ferraro says off-the-job clothing isn't new for Carhartt — the company produced a lace-back jean in the 1960s — but said the company has recently introduced a line of women's jeans.

Birmingham-based retail analyst Edward Nakfoor said that emphasizing its off-work appeal could be a smart move for the company.

"I think it's smart that they're in this Fashion in Detroit, and the evolution might be to get in some stores that have a little more "fashion,"" he said.

Nakfoor said there are risks when entering any new market or expanding market share, but said controlled, intelligent moves have the potential for favorable results.

General clothing retailers could carry a Carhartt line with the right feel, Nakfoor said, pointing to the mainstream success of other niche brands.

"I'm not climbing a mountain, but people like **The North Face** jacket," he said. "They know what North Face means. I think there's a perception of quality."

Ferraro said she believes the company's reputation for durability is a boon in a tight retail environment.

"We hear from people who say that their Carhartt jacket has lasted for 10 or 12 years," she said.

"We're not necessarily looking for a new customer — we just want a bigger share of their closet."

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