

Clothing lines transcend generations

BY KELLY LIYAKASA

Susan Kleiman has always loved to sell.

In her earlier life, she marketed Weight Watchers at Work to corporations and traversed continents for Sanrio, building the Hello Kitty brand through national accounts like Bloomingdale's and FAO Schwarz.

Now, she is looking to build on her own company Ross Daniel Adaptive Apparel, a stylish sock line for children and teenagers she launched less than two years ago.

Son Ross, now 17, was diagnosed with cerebral palsy at a young age and caring for him became Kleiman's full-time job – and ultimate passion.

"I could not find socks that were age-appropriate, comfortable and breathable for Ross," she said. "He wore braces on his legs and nothing was suitable. I thought, 'He should have the same choices as other children.'"

Kleiman has just launched breakout company and line ProtecTees, stylish clothing protectors for senior citizens that act as a waterproof bib.

"It was the same thought process when I was taking Ross out to dinner," Kleiman said. "I didn't want him to scream disability when I was feeding him. Instead of tying terry cloth bibs or a napkin around his neck, I took regular shirts and adapted them."

The designs really caught on at The Center for Discovery in Monticello where Ross is enrolled, pushing Kleiman to sell the same concept to the adult population.

"I have golf shirts and oxfords and blouses and each one has their own personality or style," she said. "It brings a lot of joy to the seniors, especially, because they don't have to wear something that's undignified for them."

Though the elderly individual would be wearing her creations, Kleiman said she's really targeting the caregiver or adult child who may wish to take their parent out for

dinner and purchasing directors from nursing homes or assisted-living residences.

"I would love to be in Target or in Kohl's or have a special needs section, but that's down the road."

Kleiman said she loves working with other women. She was selected to take a course for female entrepreneurs run by the Women's Enterprise Development Center (WEDC).

"We get a topic, we bounce it off each other and we learn from the woman who is running the group," she said. "It's a great support system. Contractors from WEDC did my website, helped me with public relations..."

Kleiman is also a trained advocate with the New York City Parents as Partners program, which lets her act as a parent representative in the school system.

"I help parents, I mentor them... it's finding the proper services and how the government can help a person with disabilities."

And, she's an active fundraiser.

"I'm on the fundraising committee for the Discovery Ball (Center for Discovery's gala May 7) and we're working on getting auction items now. We're trying to get a lot of people from the Professional Women (networking organization) to hook into this." ♦

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