

files made the seat damp. Then Griffin had her "eureka" moment. She stuffed a few cold packs into quilted fabric and sewed it up neatly, and the \$49.95 Cold Seat was born. That was two years ago. Now sold at 40 stores across the United States and online, the product will soon be available in international hot zones as well.

You could be the next inventor of a hot, or cool, product. The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office receives more than 350,000 patent applications each year. Eleven percent of patents granted list a woman as the inventor. Before you start dreaming of raking in millions of dollars, be aware that 95 percent of patents don't make money. But don't let that stop you.

For Griffin, the invention process has taken four years. First, she researched and studied all kinds of car seats, then hired someone to create a prototype. A few redesigns, four prototypes and thousands of dollars later, Griffin finally settled on one that hit the spot with test marketers.

Start-up costs were about \$50,000, and although she is not disclosing profits yet, Griffin has other ideas in the works.

Finding a solution to the problem was a bigger motivation than getting rich. "I really feel there are a lot of ideas that people are making money on, but this is something that would really help people out," Griffin said.

Stung by inspiration

When Richelle Nassos' son was stung by a bee, she frantically flipped through books and fumbled through cumbersome first-aid kits.

"I thought it sure would've been nice if someone would make something organized and kid-friendly. Something that explained how to fix the 'owie' after the drama is done," said Nassos, 35, of Cave Creek.

With her husband, Pete, she



PHOTOS BY MARK W. LIPCZYNSKI/ARIZONA WOMAN

Valley inventors show off their product: (from left) Catherine Finney displays Petz on Wheels, which are stuffed animals attached to a wheelchair. Lorice Sherman holds up her travel-tipping guides called the Grat-Pack. Richelle Nassos poses with her packaged medical first-aid kits for kids called Me4Kidz.

did just that. In December, the Me4Kidz, short for Medical Emergencies for Kids, Medibag hit the market. It took two years to design the kit and create a steel mold for mass production.

Nassos held focus groups with parents to see what their preferences were. She skipped the path of creating a prototype to tweak and produced 3,000 kits based on the initial mold.

"It was a true dive into the water. We jumped right into the pool," Nassos said. "We said, 'We know there's a need for this, we've done enough focus groups, we know it'll work.'"

The result was a colorful medicine box that won't be tossed into a cabinet and forgotten. It includes the basic bandages and burn gels along with stickers, information cards and an interactive CD with how-to information.

Start-up costs totaled \$450,000, but at \$30 each, the Medibag is projected to bring in \$200,000 by the end of this year and be profitable by the end of next year, Nassos said. It's sold through Amazon and is featured in children's specialty catalogs, as well as 10 retail stores across the Valley. By the end of the year, distribution will go international.

Creative solution

Lorice Sherman, 37, got the idea for her invention while on vacation. Nearing the end of a European trip in November, the tour guide advised Sherman to prepare gratuities for everyone who has assisted her along the way. She looked for envelopes and tried to determine how much was appropriate to give, but the process was confusing, tedious and left her wondering if she had tipped enough.

When Sherman returned home, she dug into the subject

of international gratuities, and the Grat-Pack was born.

Complete with decorative envelopes, a tipping guide and a record-keeping section tucked into a neat little folder, the all-inclusive and original gratuity package fit a niche.

"I thought there has to be an easier way," Sherman said. "If we need this, there must be a million other people out there who need something like this."

The first Grat-Pack sets were given to friends and family to test. Looking back on her earliest versions makes Sherman chuckle at how primitive they were.

"I thought I could do a pack of 12 loose envelopes and tie them with a ribbon. But they fell out and got lost in your bag, there was no place to keep track of things," she said. But with experimentation and feedback, the product evolved.

Within three months, Sherman was selling the Grat-Pack from her Higley home. She consulted a printing company for design ideas, came up with the layout and artwork, and drew upon her own experience in marketing to promote it. Sold only through her Web site, the price is \$10 (black and white) or \$20 (color).

See 'Arizona Woman'

A version of this story appears in the September issue of *Arizona Woman*. You can get it for free on racks at AJ's Fine Foods or for sale at Borders and Barnes & Noble bookstores.



MALL-BUSINESS NOTES

Growth-management expert to lead discussion

The Arizona Small Business Association is sponsoring a panel discussion Wednesday led by Cleveland-based growth management expert Joel from as a part of his Power-

house Growth workshop series.

The discussion, "How I Harnessed the Passion and Became a Company to Watch," will feature local up-and-coming business leaders.

The event will be held from 7:30 to 11:30 a.m. at the Arizona Small Business Association, 4130 E. Van Buren St., Phoenix. Cost: \$85 for association

members, \$99 for non-members.

Contact: (602) 265-4563 or www.asba.com and click on "events."

www.asba.com

Workshop to teach how to expand Web presence

The Greater Phoenix Chamber of Commerce's Business

Success Institute on Sept. 19 will host a Web Site Laboratory, a one-on-one workshop for business owners who want advice on how to bulk up their Internet presence.

Phoenix-area interactive marketing and Web design experts will be on hand with Internet-connected laptops to provide 30-minute sessions with business owners.