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SOUTH SHORE INSIDER: Plymouth company keeps you fashionably hydrated

By Dan Schneider



Donna Roth of Duxbury is the CEO of Cool Gear International in Plymouth, a designer of beverage and food storage containers. Here she holds the company's new "coolgearcan."

PLYMOUTH – Duxbury resident Donna Roth has been in the business of selling beverage containers for 30 years. Throughout that time, she has seen markets rise and fall, and tastes in certain products wax and wane.

She and her husband, Hank, run Cool Gear International, formerly Fun Designs Inc. As the CEO, Roth says that it's important for any company in a trend-driven industry to stay attuned to what's missing in the marketplace and what its customers actually want.

What's the process of coming up with a new idea for a drink container?

We go into a department in a retail store and ask, "what's missing?" either in terms of materials or product features. After that, we ask "what can we do a little different?"

You may think that any bottle is just a bottle, but it's become more of a fashion-type thing. So we have to make it a little more trendy.

There are other things to consider. Can it hook onto a backpack? Is it good for the gym? Is it good for a bicycle? If you really get into it, there are a lot of different features to a water bottle, whether you're sipping from it or chugging from it.

How has the market for beverage containers changed since you started in the '80s?

In the '80s and '90s it was mostly about licensed products. That could be anything from seasonal buckets, Halloween and Easter, or summer seasonal beverage containers with Looney Toons or Disney characters on them.

Like anything, it had a curve, and hydration was really just starting up. People had very basic water bottles, like a Rubbermaid bottle, but it wasn't fashion-oriented. Now people have a closet filled with water bottles, different bottles for kids, with different graphics and sizes. It's like T-shirts.

What is your creative process like?

My forte is product development and conceptual ideas. A lot of the patents Cool Gear uses are mine, of the 150 we have worldwide. But in reality, we have a very good design team, and its very collaborative.

I might come up with the concept, but we have some great designers. We can sit down and bounce ideas off of people, and end up making a great product because of it. It's not just one person doing it.

How many employees do you have?

We have around 60 here in Plymouth. And we have six people at our office in Shen-Zen, China.

Are your products manufactured in China?

Yes, right now. But we are looking back into the States for things that have less labor, that are pure injection-molded.

We have manufactured in the U.S. in the past, and did a very successful aluminum product line until about 2010 that we phased out just because of trends.

Why bring any of your manufacturing back to the U.S.?

It's "Made in America" for one, and it's good to give back to the people here. If it makes sense, I'd rather do it here because obviously the cost of shipping it from China is high.





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