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## The Carriage Trade: Stay-at-Home Moms Get Entrepreneurial

**Toilet-Paper Saver Starts  
 Million-Dollar Business;  
 A Pig With Four 'Tummies'**

By **RACHEL ZIMMERMAN**  
 Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL  
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Tamara Monosoff, a former business consultant and Clinton White House staffer, quit work to stay at home when her daughter Sophia was born. Then she found herself annoyed by the constant need to re-roll the toilet paper Sophia unraveled onto the floor.

So she invented a special latch to prevent the problem. Now, she sells the \$6.95 product to parents and pet owners.

"It's not glamorous," says Ms. Monosoff, who lives in Walnut Creek, Calif. But it's profitable. She projects sales of more than \$1 million next year from the TP Saver and her other products, including duck and puppy shoe-stickers that help children tell left from right. Her husband, Brad Kofoed, recently quit his job in software sales to work with her. In March, they hired a full-time nanny.



**Tamara Monosoff**


For many women who leave the work force to care for children, motherhood is making invention a necessity. The daily routine of child-care presents such a minefield of little problems that they turn to tinkering, and then market their brainstorms. This month Ms. Monosoff signed a book deal to write a guide for aspiring inventor moms while she runs her company and Web site to promote other mothers' products. This month's featured mom invented the Bellybra, an exercise girdle for pregnancy.

Betty Chin, senior vice president of merchandising at the Right Start, a children's-product retailer in Calabasas, Calif., says the uptick in mom inventions began in the late '90s, when a Colorado English teacher, Julie Aigner-Clark, came out with Baby Einstein videos -- educational tapes for infants and toddlers on fine art, classical music and poetry. The tapes prompted mothers around the country to make educational home movies. This year, retail sales of Baby Einstein products, now owned by **Walt Disney Co.**, are expected to reach \$165 million.

Denise Marshall has sold more than 20,000 Mac & Cool instant cooling bowls, which she designed after so many failed attempts to get the temperature of her kids' food down fast enough. "I was always blowing," said the former Clorox Co. mechanical engineer, who lives in Chandler, Ariz. Doing business as "Made for Mom," Ms. Marshall has teamed up with another mother, a former insurance-company risk manager, who invented a nonspill snack cup.

A Chicago banker who had given financial advice to wealthy families for 18 years, Susan Beacham quit six years ago to become a stay-at-home mom. Instead, she saw a new market. To teach children to make financial decisions, she

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designed a school curriculum on money and invented a piggy bank with four separate "tummies" to stow cash for saving, spending, donating and investing.



The TP Saver, a device to prevent babies and pets from unraveling toilet paper

The pig is a brisk seller for the One Step Ahead catalog, says Andrea Galinski, One Step's merchandising manager. She says a quarter of company sales are in goods invented by parents, mostly mothers.

Laine Caspi once worked from midnight to 8 a.m. as a suicide hotline crisis counselor in Los Angeles. Then, during the day, she would get on her hands and knees and bark like a dog with her little boy.

"At a certain point, I realized the job was incompatible with child-rearing," she says. So she quit in November 2001, when she was pregnant with her second child. Then her baby carrier brought on severe back and neck aches. In 2002, she re-engineered a more comfortable carrier and sold it from the back of her car. Within months, a dozen other mothers joined her. Today, the Ultimate Baby Wrap is sold at about 60 specialty stores and a number of big retailers,

including Babies 'R Us online, for \$39.95 to \$49.95. "I thought I would be 100% satisfied staying home with my kids," she says. "I wasn't."

Ms. Caspi now runs Parents of Invention, a company offering licensing deals to parents who have an idea or prototype but don't want to manufacture the product. Her company is selling 11 different items, including a plastic pop-on toilet handle shaped like an alligator or hippo "to encourage flushing," a vibrating nursing pillow that fits overweight women and a key chain that dispenses antibacterial wipes.

Jill Avery-Zuleeg, Michele Free and Carmela Zamora-Robertson met when they worked in the same marketing group at Apple Computer. In the mid-'90s, they all got married and started having children.

When Ms. Avery-Zuleeg's oldest child, Tanner, was nearly three, he emerged from his room dressed, but with his clothes on backwards and inside out. Beaming, he screamed: "I did it all by myself," and a new marketing concept was born.

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Ms. Avery-Zuleeg, of Saratoga, Calif., recruited her former colleagues to start a line of videos, "All by Myself," to teach children independence. They took a lighting course from friends and used their children as actors. They have sold 80,000 of the getting-dressed tapes and 25,000 copies of a tape about children caring for pets.

These days the women work on the video business three nights a week from 9 until 1. "I'm always tired," Ms. Avery-Zuleeg says.

Writer Hilary Illick -- whose play, "Eve-olution," which she co-wrote with another mom, explores the dark side of motherhood -- says there are certainly some stay-at-home moms who "feel like going to mommy-and-me gymnastics class and doing potato-print drawings are fulfilling ways to spend their day." But many others need something more tangible and are constantly worrying, "what did I do today that was worthwhile?"

Studies suggest that the number of professional women opting out to become stay-at-home moms is on the rise. An informal Harvard Business School survey of 150 women done in 2001 found that only 38% of graduates in their child-bearing years are in the work force.

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