



Photo by Tin Nguyen

LOOK BETTER, FEEL BETTER: Just because she had a little setback didn't mean that she lost her fashion sense, Christina Daves decided when she broke her foot a year or so ago. She started CastMedic Design to tap into 'the healing power of fashion.'

Fashionistas catch a break: CastMedic is off and running

BY BILL WALSH
Piedmont Business Journal Staff Writer

Christina Daves thought she knew business, and who could blame her? With a partner, she ran a home design shop in Haymarket, and its success makes it clear that she knew all about running a retail establishment, about payrolls and taxes and workers' comp, all about markups and sales strategies. All about all the things that most of us know about running a business.

Now, after almost a year of running an international start-up with orders taken and processed in another city and manufacturing done on another continent, Christina Daves knows a great deal more about business.

Daves founded and, in February of this year launched, CastMedic Designs, where fashion and fun meet medical necessity.

"This unique line of accessories provides the opportunity for both adults and

children to accessorize medical boots for school, work, or play, and allows people the chance to have some fun while recovering from an injury, instead of being sub-conscious about it," according to the company's promotional literature.

Daves first conceived of CastMedic Designs when she jumped off an unsteady boat, landing, barefoot, on a tie-up cleat in the late summer of 2010, breaking her foot.

She didn't go to the doctor for weeks, but with a trip to New York nearing, Daves made an appointment and got the bad news — and a boot.

Fashionable New York. Unfashionable medical boot enveloping and protecting her broken bone.

"I met another woman in New York wearing a medical boot," Daves recalled, and asked her if she would welcome the opportunity to decorate that clunkiness. Absolutely, the woman replied with enthusiasm.

Back home, Daves started researching

and found that there likely was a market for what she was considering. Doctors annually prescribe about two million walking medical boots.

Focus groups that she gathered agreed. "To this day," she said, "no one has told me I'm crazy; everybody loves it."

Daves launched the company in February.

Currently, get prescribed one of those boots, and you have 58 choices on how to make it more fun or more fashionable.

"We've got a Wrap-It, which is a faux fur cuff, and there are four different styles of those," Daves said. "There is a matching fur puff accessory, so it really looks sort of like an Ug boot — really cute.

"Then we have Strap-Its, which are flowers, and there are 13 of those. And the Sock-Its, which are little half socks which go up the boot, and there are nine styles of those, and we have 16 Click-Its, which are theme buttons, so you can do music,

sports, beach, girly, all kinds of fun stuff," mostly for children, Daves said.

And Daves has been far-sighted enough to think about after-market value, as well.

"The flowers on the Strap-Its, for instance," she said, "come with alligator clips so you can wear them in your hair, in bows, to wrap gifts, to put around a wine bottle," she suggested.

If it sounds as though most of the marketing is geared toward women and children, that's true. For the moment.

"I hope to get sports licensing, and I think that will definitely bring in the adult men," she said. "What guy wouldn't go to a Redskin game with Redskin sock?"

She has come up with all the designs, and now, after setting the company up, spends most of her time on marketing and promotion.

Setting up took some doing.

"I spent five months trying to get a manufacturer here, because I really wanted to do it here, but nobody wanted to work with

me," she lamented. "It was a new idea, and the response was, 'no, we're not interested.'"

Why they weren't is mind-boggling; two million new prescriptions every year.

"It's big numbers," Daves said. "I am having it done in China, and you don't get to just make...100 pieces in China."

The manufacturing was the toughest part of the puzzle, Daves said.

"I went to a textile show in New York with sample products in hand, not telling anybody what it was," she said.

"Can you make this?" Serendipitously, there were two gentlemen in a booth working with someone who thought they could help. We signed a non-disclosure agreement and they began working as my middleman," Daves said.

"That's not cost-effective, but I had so many people tell me that for the first go-around [in China], find someone who has been doing this for 20 years, and pay them to help you and guide you."

She set up an arrangement

with a fulfillment company in Virginia Beach, worked with others on web development, and, more important for the long-term success of the venture, has developed relationships with other big players, including a company that is the largest medical supply company for orthopedic braces in the world, she said.

"By the end of the year, we should be in doctors' offices in about 15 states," she said, and she has initiated arrangements with companies that sell medical boots to handle these accoutrements, as well.

The CastMedic Design line will also likely soon be in a pharmacy near you. The line is already being handled by Amazon.

This is likely just the beginning. Daves said she has some great ideas for other parts of the body.

And the market is pretty wide open. There is a company that does some similar things for kids, "but there is nothing that's fashion-forward," she said, "nothing for the professional woman who still has to go to

work, and she has carpal tunnel syndrome, and has to wear this awful black...thing. That is really the goal — to make it a fashion-forward item."

That makes people feel better while they heal, Daves claims: "The problem" with medical boots, her literature claims, "is that these devices make people feel ugly and that negatively affects the healing process."

There is scientific evidence, she said, that if you feel better about yourself, you heal better. There are studies that say if you have a positive attitude, that you will recover quicker."

In May, after more than 350,000 Internet votes were cast, CastMedic Designs was recognized as one of the Top 200 Leading Moms in Business by StartupNation.com. CastMedic Designs was one of only 200 businesses nationwide to receive this honor.

"I just knew it was such a great idea," Daves concluded. "We have never looked back."

CastMedic Designs is online at castmedicdesigns.com.

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