

BUSINESS

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Mabel's Labels founders turn a parental pet peeve into a useful product line

Business venture becomes family affair by marriage

BY MELANIE CUMMINGS

Special to the Post

Slap so long to the lost and found bin. Slap on a Mabel's Label and all those missing mittens will roam back to be reunited with their partners.

The same goes for the missing sweaters, lunch bags, shoes and the long list of other personal items left behind at school, daycare, camp and in the locker room.

The super adhesive, durable, dishwasher- and microwave-safe labels, iron-ons and shoe tags are the brainchild of our moms: Cynthia Esp, Julie Ellis, Tricia Mumby and Julie Cole.

Between them they are parents to 10 children — all under age five — who are pros at losing their stuff.

Now, with their names (icons for the re-reader set) labeled on everything, all that is hauled out of the house comes back in, if not daily, at some point in time.

The business idea was born out of first-hand frustration and a desire to create a family-friendly career. Esp is a teacher, Ellis a financial planner, Mumby a graphic artist and Cole is a lawyer.

But with far-reaching interest and uses for children and seniors alike, the company is bursting beyond its expectations. Inquiries and sales have come from as far abroad as England and Italy with the majority of them emanating from the U.S. and across Canada.

"Our company is getting so big we've had to hire staff and still arrange daycare for our kids," said Cole, who is a Burlington resident. Three part-time workers help with production.

It's become a catch-22 where finding a balance between running the business and being a mom can be tough at times.

It must agree with their lifestyle though. When they began researching, testing and registering the business two years ago, there were only seven children. Three more have since been added.

Each of the partners has a role to play in its operation. Ellis handles the finances, Esp oversees production, Cole takes care of marketing and Mumby manages the Web site — www.mabel.ca.

"Having a lot of partners to run the business is a great way to share the work-

load," added Cole.

Being friends first and later related to each other makes decisions on all the business issues far less trying.

Esp and Cole are sisters. They originally met Ellis and Mumby while students at the University of Waterloo. But then their friendships turned into kinship. Ellis is married to Cole's and Esp's brother Dave, making them all sisters-in-law. And Mumby hooked up with the Cole's youngest uncle, Joe Lyons, five years ago.

When work doesn't beckon, the clans are swapping childcare or heading to a jointly-owned cottage in South River.

Work and play, all together, has truly made Mabel's Labels a family affair.



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The entrepreneurs behind the Mabel's Labels team are, from left, Tricia Mumby, Julie Ellis, Julie Cole and Cynthia Esp.