

Local gets support from Dragons? Den mentors



By Mark?Pavilons

If you think every practical commodity has already been invented, all you have to do is look at one of King's up-and-coming entrepreneurs.

Long-time resident Nicholas Capobianco and his cousin Richard Nelson are carrying the family torch and marketing a product that has been endorsed by Canada's high-profile business leaders on CBC's The Dragons' Den.

For the millions of Canadians who wear eyeglasses, Grippears may be a saviour. The beauty is in its simplicity. The moniker comes from purpose of these tiny rubber gems ? affixed to the ends of the earpieces (temple tips) Grippears prevent glasses from moving or falling off your head.

Grippears were originally designed and marketed by the duo's grandfather, Ed Swanek. In trying a homemade solution to this age-old dilemma, Swanek attached an elastic band to his glasses to keep them firmly on his head. When the elastic snapped, some of it remained wrapped around the earpiece. He examined it, took out a rubber fishing lure from tackle box and he was on to something.

He spent a couple of years in the early ?90s selling his product door to door. He put it on hold to deal with family matters and the Grippears, and their mass potential, remained stagnant for roughly 20 years.

Capobianco and Nelson resurrected the idea and spent several months laying the groundwork to kick-start the project once more. They established partnerships and got all the paperwork in order.

With most of the preliminary work already done by Swanek, along with a healthy inventory of product, the two young entrepreneurs had nothing to lose, and everything to gain.

But their motivation wasn't success and affluence. They did it for their grandpa.

Swanek had ?faith in the product and faith in my grandchildren.?

With newfound passion, the two men decided to audition for Canada's preeminent business reality show, The Dragons' Den, which wrapped up its seventh season.

The audition stage involved a quick pitch to show producers and their three-minute time slot was stretched to 10 as Grippears drew widespread attention. They took their turn in line in March of 2012.

Just weeks later they headed to the Toronto studio to film the episode and hopefully get funding and endorsement by Canada's power brokers.

They were well prepared and confident.

Making their pitch, aided by two females doing backflips wearing Grippears, the product quickly got a reaction from Jim Treliving, owner of Boston Pizza and Mr. Lube. He offered up the requested \$40,000 investment, asking for a 35% share of the company. Treliving has said 'simplicity is the key to success' and Grippears obviously appealed to him. This was followed by David Chilton (The Wealthy Barber) who undercut Treliving by asking for 30% ownership. Capobianco and Nelson were then asked to bring Swanek into the studio and his story garnered more support. In the end, Treliving, Chilton and Arlene Dickinson (Venture Communications) joined forces on the investment and equal ownership shares.

While it was somewhat intimidating trying to impress the panel, their stress faded quickly as they got into the swing of their pitch. It was like the toughest job interview ever.

Capobianco stressed to the panel they really needed their expertise, mentorship and connections and not necessarily the funds.

After the show, they remained in constant contact with Chilton, who was more than willing to offer his advice and guidance. He's still just a phone call away.

As the duo continues to work at the contractual obligations, they've received a lot of positive feedback since the show aired. It's estimated the episode drew more than three million viewers.

The website sales are growing steadily and they've partnered with the CNIB to contribute \$1 per pair of Grippears sold to this worthy national charity. According to the CNIB, a staggering one in seven Canadians will be diagnosed with an eye disease in their lifetime. Every 12 minutes, someone in Canada begins to lose their sight, but many Canadians aren't aware that 75 per cent of vision loss can be prevented or treated.

As well, the duo is trying to join forces with WSIB (Workplace Safety & Insurance Board) to promote the use of Grippears to safety glasses.

They are available in seven different colours and three different sizes, and retail for \$4.99.

The guys are enthusiastic about their rekindled entrepreneurial spirit and seeing this project succeed. Capobianco hopes to return to teaching and Nelson is currently doing sales for a major uniform company. Both believe this experience can only help them in their careers. And what better references can someone have than entrepreneurial icons Treliving, Chilton and Dickinson?

The duo will have a booth set up at the Schomberg Fair so check them out.

Necessity is the mother of invention in the case of Grippears.

To order yours, visit www.grippears.com. You can email them at grippears@gmail.com.