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## Business sells better water bottle option

Article Text:

By ROGER AMSDEN

Sunday News Correspondent

LOUDON

TWO LOCAL WOMEN, who met a few years ago while their children were taking swimming lessons at Clough Pond, are busy trying to change the world, one metal water bottle at a time.

They are trying to wean people off what they see as a dangerous addiction to the convenience of commercially bottled water.

"I've always thought bottled water was a big, expensive waste. A lot of it is tap water to start with. You're wasting money and you're definitely polluting by throwing away all those plastic bottles," said Alicia Grimaldi.

A holistic health counselor, Grimaldi said she has always had concerns about the safety of plastic water bottles and the possibility that chemicals from the plastic can leach into the water.

Grimaldi said that as they sat watching their children swim, she told Tina White that one of her dreams was to see people drinking water from something that was safe and wouldn't be thrown away and end up in the waste stream. After White replied confidently "we can do that," the two started working together to find a way to put that vision into practice.

White, who had her own business creating personalized candy wrappers for chocolate bars, said that concern over the impact of bottled water on the environment, from the vast amount of oil used to make the bottles and then transport them, and their haphazard disposal into the waste stream, is appalling to think about.

"We thought there was a better, more sustainable way that would see people with reusable containers drinking local water right from their own tap. So many people have bought into the idea that bottled water tastes better. That's just not true," said White.

Grimaldi said that people who are concerned that the quality of their tap water isn't as good as they would like can always use a tap water system filter to enhance its quality.

With White's computer research skills leading the way and assistance from Liz-Stella Ford in designing their water bottles, the women searched for an American company that they could do business with, one that could make the bottles from food-grade stainless steel.

Much to their disappointment, no American companies could be found that could make the kinds of bottles they needed at a price that would be acceptable for consumers.

So they turned to China, where they were able to locate a manufacturer, and whose products they have tested by a third party to ensure that they are contamination-free.

In 2007 AffirmWater LLC, the company they formed, made its first Internet sale, and their water bottles can now be found in many stores around the state.

"We started putting them in stores on a consignment basis, and many of them sold out within days," Grimaldi said. So far they have shipped their bottles to 35 states and seven Canadian provinces and on busy days bring in other Loudon moms to help them with shipping. Many of the shipping materials are recycled from Granite State Health Foods in Concord.

They run the business from their homes with White doing most of the printing and Grimaldi handling the shipping.

As business has increased, they have contracted with a Massachusetts firm to do the printing of special orders on the water bottles.

And they received a big boost in visibility when Chicago's city government and the city of Olympia, Wash., decided to do away with bottled water in their offices and placed large orders for their employees as part of "green office" initiatives.

Last year they shipped about 3,000 bottles, nearly double what they had sold in the previous year.

On the Web site, bottles sold individually come in 17-, 26- and 32-ounce sizes for \$22 to \$28, and they come with gentle green slogans such as "Tread Lightly," "Peace" and "Inspired."

Both White and Grimaldi said they are looking to expand their business, and offer local jobs for other women who are in similar situations with young children.

Both are active in community activities, including supporting the Loudon Elementary School Environmental Club and look for opportunities to work with local groups. Last year the sophomore class at Merrimack Valley High School held a successful fundraising drive with Affirm Water bottles to raise money for class activities. And they donate 5 percent of their profits to the Nature Conservancy.

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