THE BIG QUEASY

ALUMNA 'MOMPRENEUR' KNOCKS NAUSEA TO ITS KNEES

BY JO ANN LLOYD

Romy Taormina

HOW DO YOU SPELL "RELIEF?"

For tens of thousands of people suffering from nausea, it's spelled "P-s-i." As in Psi (pronounced "sigh") Bands, stylish acupressure wristbands made of medical-grade synthetic rubber, co-created by alumna **Romy Taormina (BUS'03)** and Carla Falcone.

The attractive acupressure bands were born of necessity. When Taormina was pregnant with her two boys, now 9 and 6, she used a similar product – also based on the principles of acupressure – to alleviate her morning sickness symptoms.

But those products were not stylish, and no other choices were available back then. They were gray, they weren't waterproof, and they weren't adjustable. "Unfortunately, my nausea didn't stop, because I needed to take a shower. So I was left with waterlogged wrist bands, or I'd have to take them off in order to shower."

It wasn't until Taormina was hosting a baby shower for her good friend and now business partner Falcone that the idea – the solution – suddenly presented itself. Taormina and Falcone were discussing how those dull gray, elastic acupressure wristbands worked but lacked functions and were unstylish. "We knew we could make something better," Taormina said. "That was our 'ah-ha' moment" … the gentle push they needed to give birth to Psi Bands.

"Mompreneurs" Taormina and Falcone, both account executives at an advertising agency before they became partners in Psi Bands, envisioned wristbands that would be stylish, waterproof, adjustable around the wrist and at the acupressure point, comfortable and affordable.

Now they just needed to design and develop it. Realizing they could use some tips from an expert, Falcone sought the advice of good friend and product designer-developer Pieter Schouten. "Not only did he want to give us advice, he wanted to be part of the business," Taormina said.

And so in 2006 the three founded Psi Bands. The bands have only been available to the public since October 2007, but it hasn't taken long for the nifty, stylish device to take off. The product is now offered nationwide at more than 5,000 Rite Aid stores, more than 400 Longs Drug Stores, REI, Pharmaca and online at Amazon.com and drugstore.com, to name a few.

The trio is growing its company internationally. But because Psi Bands are a medical device, it gets complicated to import them. Each country has its own set of rules and regulations, explained Taormina. FDA-cleared Psi Bands are considered a medical device, because the product alleviates nausea, a medical condition.

By employing the ancient healing art of wrist acupressure, Psi Bands relieve the symptoms of nausea and vomiting caused by morning and motion sickness, as well as the side effects of chemotherapy and anesthesia. The bands are placed on the inside of both wrists, 2 1/2 finger widths above the center of the wrist crease between the wrist tendons, an acupressure point known as Nei-kuan. The band has a button facing in and an adjustable dial to personalize the amount of pressure applied.

Taormina said Cal Poly's hands-on learning "absolutely, without question" helped her succeed in business. "I am able to jump into things, because I know I can. The learn-by-doing concept teaches you to not be afraid to take risks. We all make mistakes, but mistakes become learning opportunities."
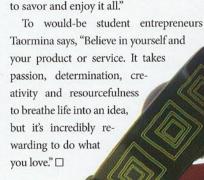
Cal Poly, she said, also teaches students to work together as a team. "I learned that the sum is greater than its parts."

There was no way to prepare Taormina for the challenge of juggling work and home, though. "Separating work from home is my greatest challenge. There are simply not enough hours in the day to accomplish everything I prefer. But I would not have it any other way." She loves what she does and knows she is providing a good role model for her sons.

Along with the company's success and growth, Taormina has grown, too. "I am learning to enjoy the journey," she said. "Running a business is a roller coaster. There are high points and low points. I try to savor and enjoy it all."

To would-be student entrepreneurs Taormina says, "Believe in yourself and your product or service. It takes passion, determination, creativity and resourcefulness to breathe life into an idea, but it's incredibly rewarding to do what you love." □