



SMART IDEAS

NICE THREADS: Creating stylish one-piece baby outfits suits Jennifer Hughes (pictured with daughters Phoebe, I., and Lili) just fine.



Clothes-Minded

FED UP WITH TRADITIONAL OUTFITS, ONE MOM TAKES BABY CLOTHES TO A WHOLE NEW LEVEL.

BY NICHOLE L. TORRES

WHAT: A line of one-piece baby clothing designed to look like multi-piece outfits
WHO: Jennifer Hughes of Liloebe LLC
WHERE: Traverse City, Michigan
WHEN: Started in January 2002

JENNIFER HUGHES AND HER FRIENDS always loved the look of the cute baby clothes they received at baby showers. But when it came time to put the layers on—the shorts, the shirt and the overshirt—it hit home to Hughes, 36, how inconvenient the baby separates were. “I had tons of these outfits that were completely impractical,” she explains.

Hughes wondered why no one had thought of designing one-piece outfits for babies and toddlers that just

looked like they were made up of two or three pieces. After all, a one-piece outfit would be much easier to get on and off, and it wouldn't bunch up as the baby moved.

After the birth of her second daughter, Hughes started seriously researching what it would take to launch her line of baby clothes. After coming up with the corporate name, Liloebe LLC (a combination of her daughters' names, Lili and Phoebe), Hughes initially focused on securing big corporate accounts. However, “They wouldn't touch me with a 10-foot pole,” she explains, because her operation was so new. So Hughes went to Plan B and embraced the boutique market, which fell head-over-heels in love with her stylish, affordably priced (around \$20 retail) creations.

The most difficult part of her marketing, says Hughes, has been explaining the product to customers. Because the outfits in her Stylease line look like they're made up of sep-

arate pieces, potential buyers have to actually touch her products to understand why they're so special. Now Hughes is mounting a grass-roots consumer marketing campaign. “That's the kind of word-of-mouth that's going to grow this product,” she says. With 2003 sales projected into the six figures, word is definitely getting out.

Clean Sweep

WHAT: A trash disposal and street maintenance service that employs people in the social services network
WHO: Chris Martin of CleanScapes Inc.
WHERE: Seattle
WHEN: Started in 1997

CHRIS MARTIN LIVED IN AN AREA surrounded by missions, homeless shelters and trash-filled alleys in the Pioneer Square section of Seattle. It was there that he got the inspiration for his business. Martin, 36, wanted to start a service that would not only help clean up the area, but also employ the very people who needed jobs the most: clients in Seattle's social services network.

“We try to hire employees [who] are what people might describe as marginally employable people, people who might not otherwise have a job,” says Martin. “It's pretty rewarding when you take someone who has been on the streets or in a drug-treatment program and they [come] to work every day, clean, drug-free, confident about their place in the world and confident in their jobs.”

With \$1,500 in start-up capital, Martin formed his business as a for-profit enterprise. He based this decision on the advice of a man who ran a Lutheran community center in the neighborhood. “He said, ‘You ought to be a for-profit company, because when [your employees] go to apply for and work another job, it would send a much stronger message,’” says Martin.

Armed with his good idea, Martin first had to sell it to local private property owners in Seattle who expressed some interest in his service.