

Staying the course, a flip flop at a time

BY DEBORAH HUTCHISON

Do you know what it means to be gutsy? Santa Barbara resident Linda Spann does. As the CEO and founder of HotFlops, Spann followed the example her mother set years before and embarked on her own journey that began one (flip-flopped) step at a time.

HotFlops began as a seed of an idea on Spann's honeymoon and flourished into a highly successful and innovative footwear company. With a background in en-

gineering, Spann discovered a way to attach components with a one-piece mold to a foam device. This breakthrough created a better, more comfortable and longer-lasting flip flop.

Realizing that her new invention needed exposure to succeed, Spann ingeniously sent out 10,000 single flip flops with the note, "Come and get your mate" attached. The orders poured in.

Spann recently sold her flip flop business for a sizable profit and admits she enjoys the royalties that roll in, but says

she will never forget how tirelessly she worked to get her idea off the ground.

"It was tough," Spann admitted. "I would be up 12 to 15 hours a day. When the house smelled like rubber, the kids would say, 'We can't take this!'"

But Spann's unwavering belief in her idea, coupled with the support of her family, ultimately led to a big win.

The success of HotFlops is only the cherry on top for Spann. After graduating

see **SPANN** on page 8A

SPANN

Continued from page 7A

third in her class from Lewis University with a degree in aviation and engineering (she was one of two women in a class of 400 men), Spann defined what it meant to be gutsy and completely switched gears.

After noticing that the apartment building she and her then-husband were living in was shoddy and poorly run, Spann went straight to the property owner and declared, "I can do better than this. If you hire me for 30 days, I'll increase revenue."

"It blew their minds!" Spann said. She was hired on the spot and, within a few years, was successfully managing thousands of units.

But she didn't stop there. Needing a change (both personally and professionally), Spann made the decision to move to Santa Barbara in 1986. With no job prospects, she placed an ad in the paper that read, "Need a property manager who will increase profits? Your wish has been granted." The offers came in, and soon Spann was running the Montecito Inn.

After marrying her second husband, a local architect, and having children, Spann again changed course and the idea for HotFlops was born. Just one more Gutsy move from an amazing woman.

So where does her courage come from?

"My mother was gutsy, super gutsy!"

Spann says.

Raising her daughters alone in Chicago, Spann's mother cultivated a strong sense of independence in her daughters. Spann recalls a time when she was home from college for the weekend and lamented her frustration over the men in her aviation class to her mother.

"Just remember, your A's are equivalent to their C's," Spann's mother said. "So do your laundry and get back in the car!"

Though she passed away too early at age 53 from cancer, Spann's mother became the gutsy example she strives to follow each and every day.

"I will never forget," Spann said, "when my mother went to the South Side of Chicago during the height of the Civil Rights movement to recruit African-American women to sell jewelry. She made a difference in their lives and inspired them to get out of the house and do something."

Spann continues to carry her mother's torch and blaze her own trail. With an infectious sense of humor and a quiet strength, Spann defines what it means to be a gutsy gal. Perhaps we can all take a page from her playbook and strap on our gutsy shoes (or flip flops) and go!

• *Deborah Hutchison is the CEO of Gutsy Gals Inspire Me, a Santa Barbara-based company devoted to honoring and highlighting women in business. E-mail Deborah@gutsygalsinspireme.com and submit your tales of triumph.*

JUNE 12-18, 2009

A REPORT ON WOMEN IN TRI-COUNTY BUSINESS

WOMEN & CO.

PAGE 7A

www.pacificlines.com