



JENNY SWIGODA / TIMES STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Kathy Parisi opens one of the Lock-A-Bye bags to show the interior slash resistant fabric.

Posted on Wed, Sep. 1, 2010

## Sisters hold the key for a lock-bag creation

By Diane Prokop

Times Staff Writer

The Thomson sisters, natives of Millbrook, are close as sisters go - almost by necessity. After all, their brothers outnumber them eight to three.

Necessity was also the mother of their invention and their business.

The sisters - Ann Keller, Mary "MT" Thomson and Kathy Parisi - always traveled together over the Christmas holidays and found that while some of them snorkeled or swam in the surf, one of them was always forced to stay behind to watch everyone's stuff.

"Then we'd have to catch that person up with what everyone was talking about," Thomson said.

Over cocktails on the Caribbean island of Anguilla, they decided that they should create a secure tote bag, and the idea for their Lock-A-Bye was born.

Thomson comes from a hospitality background and was required to take money to the bank in a locking bank bag, so she knew how the zipper should work.

In addition to the lock, the fabric is made of slash-resistant, stain and water-resistant fabric with a galvanized cable sewn into the handle. It also comes with a soft knit wristband with a zippered compartment, which can be used to stash a key, a ship-to-shore card or some cash.

Parisi uses it as a hair scrunchie.

"It really prevents the slash and grab," Thomson said.

The sisters did a lot of market research before they approached a patent attorney recommended by their attorney brother, Bill Thomson.

"Just because a product isn't in the market doesn't mean the patent doesn't exist," Parisi said.

While the approval process takes on average three to five years, it took the Thomson sisters only 18 months. They received approval in July 2009.

During the patent process, they sewed up a bag themselves and took their invention to prototype. They struggled with the fabrication from the stain-resistant fabric to the logo, even a simple o-ring on the bag.

"We wanted the best product. We wanted to put out a trusted product as we (launch) our brand," Parisi said.

While the Lock-A-Bye was envisioned as a vacation bag, the tote bags are also practical for the office, where they can be locked at your desk, or on the soccer field, where they can be locked to a bleacher, a fence or a tree. They come in four patterns and in black.

Future designs include hospital bags, backpacks and duffel bags.

The Thomsons began shipping their product, which they sell online, last month from their Bensalem headquarters and already have a sales force in place across the country that believes in the product.

"Some do home demonstrations. Others have contacts with boutiques and trade shows. One couple is interested in doing high-end mall kiosks," Thomson said.

In addition to investing their own money, the sisters are thankful for the support they received from family and very close friends who approached them about investing in the company.

The bags are produced in China, but that's not for lack of trying to manufacture them in the United States. The sisters said they traveled all over the country trying to find a cost-effective manufacturer.

While the introductory price of the large tote Lock-A-Bye bags is \$149, they would have had to sell them for \$500 to make a profit.

The sisters have also worked with the local chapter of SCORE, which offered them business advice after they brought them a business plan and a mock-up of the bag.

Getting the business up and running has been a challenge but one the sisters have enjoyed.

"It's a labor of love," Keller said.

Reporter Diane Prokop can be reached at 215-354-3036 or [dprokop@phillynews.com](mailto:dprokop@phillynews.com)

### **Lock 'em up . . .**

For more information on the Lock-A-Bye, call 1-877-LOCKBAG or visit [www.lockabye.com](http://www.lockabye.com)

Northeast Times readers can get free shipping on their Internet orders by entering the TA1179 code.