

DivotPack: Schwegman's Light-Bulb Moment

By MEGAN NICOLAI
Minneapolis Star Tribune

Katie Schwegman had no experience building or marketing a new invention

But she had faith in her idea, and, after being laid off from the golf course where she had worked the past seven years, now was the time to make a go of it.

After spending good chunks of her 35 years on golf courses, Schwegman, who played on teams beginning in middle school, saw room for improvement.



Katie Schwegman

The problem was the time-consuming task of filling courses pocked by divots. While golfers are supposed to replace their own divots, many don't, leaving grounds crews lugging around three-gallon buckets of a sand and soil mixture, as they kneel down to fill the holes with a cup.

Watching the crews at Stonebrooke Golf Club in Shakopee, where she worked, fill divots in the summer of 2009, while she gathered leaves with a backpack leaf blower, Schwegman had her light bulb moment.

"It was just about putting two ideas together," said Schwegman, who works out of her Bloomington home.

She enlisted the help of a mechanical engineer who played with the men's league for Stonebrooke. After she paid him to help her build several prototypes, Schwegman was able to develop a model that everyone she worked with at the course seemed excited about.

"Everyone has been very positive, excited about it," Schwegman said. "Right now golf courses are trying to do more with less, and this way good groundskeeping doesn't have to be the first thing to go."

The DivotPack, which sells for \$349, is a backpack with a gravity-fed tube that can hold up to three gallons of sand mixture. It is designed to ease back strain and save hours from the process of filling divots by hand. And with 16,000 golf courses around the country, including about 600 in Minnesota alone, Schwegman believes her invention has major potential.

"Marketing the product has been a grass-roots effort," said Schwegman, who enlisted her sister-in-law and publicist, Jennifer Schwegman.

They recently attended the Golf Industry Show in Orlando, the world's largest international show for golf professionals. The last-minute decision to attend paid off, as they sold out her first production round of 250 DivotPacks.

"The response was fantastic, almost overwhelming," Schwegman said of the national and international audience. Their product booth was constantly swamped with international investors taking pictures of the patent-pending DivotPack and camera crews from abroad covering the event. They even asked a group of foreign investors to leave after a few too many pictures, worried that they would see an identical product in a foreign

market within months.

"A lot of people looked into our booth and had a 'why didn't I think of that' moment," Jennifer Schwegman said. "It's a simple idea, but there's nothing else in the industry with the backpack format."

Jeff Johnson, Superintendent of The Minikahda Club near Lake Calhoun in Minneapolis, liked the early prototypes he tested. "It was very easy to use," said Johnson, who used to be Schwegman's boss. "It definitely meets our needs for divot repair."

Schwegman sees the product applying to more than just golf. Soccer, polo, or football fields could all use it, since scarring on their fields is a safety concern. The Minnesota Vikings have already placed two orders for the DivotPack online, Schwegman said. A spokesman for the team did not return calls for comment.

Schwegman is now considering several ideas for how to improve the DivotPack, such as allowing golf courses to customize colors or adding attachments for sod care. She is also searching for a national distributor to market it, and hopes to have an international distributor this summer, she said.

To Jennifer Schwegman, the possibilities seem endless.

"This is the kind of product that keeps you up at night," she said.

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