

# Next stop: Oprah?

## JC entrepreneur targets potential billion dollar world market

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Johns Creek entrepreneur Lesley Hatfield certainly knows a good consumer market when she sees one.

According to the World Health Organization, by the year 2025 there will be 1.1 billion women in the world over the age of 50 and either already in menopause or fast approaching it.

Joining them are tens of millions of other women, not yet 50, who are either pregnant, on medication for some disease or on long-term chemotherapy as cancer victims.

The one thing they all share in common is a propensity to suffer from what is jokingly called "night sweats" – those times

when a woman's body temperature increases so greatly that she breaks out in a sweat and wakes up at night in bed drenched.

For the millions of women who suffer from them, they are anything but a joke.

For Hatfield, an entrepreneur since she was 10 years old, it's an opportunity to fill a need.

"Whether someone's going through menopause or going through chemotherapy, it's all about making that person's journey easier by making them more comfortable," said Hatfield.

So in 2004 Hatfield, a licensed personal trainer and exercise physiologist, started NiteSweatz, a niche lingerie company that makes hip sleepwear from the same patented moisture

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Johns Creek resident and Exercise Physiologist **Lesley Hatfield** has parlayed her understanding of women's health issues into a high-tech niche lingerie business called Nite Sweatz.

## NiteSweatz: Potential \$ billion world market

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wicking material many long-distance runners' clothes are made from.

"We work very hard to develop garments with outstanding construction that meet the needs of women's ever-changing bodies. The result is a lightweight, cool, slinky fabric that feels wonderful," said Hatfield.

### An idea is born

Since moving to Alpharetta after graduating in 1993 with B.S. degrees in Exercise Physiology and Sports Management from Miami University in Ohio, Hatfield has consistently heard complaints from her female personal training clients about hot flashes and night sweats.

In fact, it was one long-time client's complaint one morning in early 2004 that gave Hatfield the idea to start NiteSweatz.

"We were running in Oxford Mill and she started talking about her horrible night sweats the night before. I looked down at her moisture-free running clothes and just off the cuff said, 'Why don't you sleep in those?'"

It was a light bulb moment, Hatfield says.

She immediately began researching the marketplace on-line to see if any sleepwear company was already using the high-tech, moisture-wicking material runners have come to take for granted.

"I found one small manufacturer, but the pajamas were very matronly and frumpy. The woman now going through peri-menopause and menopause is often still a pretty young 40-something. She's still sexy so why not make her feel and look good at the same time?"

A few weeks later, as owner of FitWorks – a wellness consulting company Hatfield founded in 1999 to bring fitness to the local corporate workplace – Hatfield was asked to participate in a business women's conference in Buckhead.

After her part of the program, she decided to stay and hear the luncheon speaker – Sara Blakely, the 2002 Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year and founder of the Atlanta-based, multi-million dollar, international hosiery and intimate apparel company SPANX.

"She told her story of how she came up with this fabulous idea and what she had to do to make it happen to get where she is today.

After that lunch, I got back in my car and drove home to Alpharetta. I kept thinking about the sleepwear idea and I called my mom on the cell phone and told her, 'I've got to do this mother. I don't know how, but I'm going to.'"

Hatfield did more research and found Intera – the only patented permanent fabric treatment that wicks moisture away

from the body and won't wash off.

Then she found a manufacturer in Canada who could take her design ideas and make the "hip, cool, dry sleepwear" she envisioned from cool, hip fabrics treated with Intera.

From there, NiteSweatz was born in April 2004.

"This isn't your average sleepwear. It's fashionable, feminine and fun sleepwear, based on styles we love and feel comfortable in and it's dry because of the specially developed fabric, which helps alleviate discomfort due to hot flashes and night sweats," said Hatfield.

### Boutiques carry line in 22 states

Almost two years later, the line of gowns, kimono tops and yoga pants in nine styles and four colors are sold for \$100-\$150 in boutiques in 22 states throughout the country. On-line sales are on a steady increase and as this publication was heading to press, Hatfield had just completed an interview and photo shoot with Women's Wear Daily, the trade "bible" of the fashion industry.

Hatfield was also on her way to New York for a high-end, international lingerie show to meet with buyers from around the world and potential sales reps for the mid-west and west coast.

"We've tried to grow steady and smart. We started retail in the southeast and moved into the northeast late last year. If you go out there and promise the moon to everyone but you can't supply them, then you'll die on the vine."

North Fulton stores which carry the line, include Intimacy at Phipps Plaza; Phine & Whimsey at the Regal Shopping Center on Medlock Bridge, The Chandlery in Roswell and The Red Hound on Old Milton Parkway.

"It's a great niche product for a boutique to carry. It's not your typical lingerie. It's a gift item and it's a little different. You can't just get it in your local department store."

### Entrepreneur's spirit started early in life

Hatfield says she recognized this huge market for a new product because of her entrepreneurial spirit, first developed at the age of 10.

"I wanted a purse that my single mother couldn't afford, so I said to myself,



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Gowns, kimono tops and yoga pants in cool colors make up the product line of NiteSweatz, a niche lingerie company using high-tech, moisture-wicking material to make fashionable sleepwear for women.

how can I get that purse?"

Her solution was to buy a big bag of salt water taffy – not easily gotten in her hometown of Middletown, Ohio – and sell it in individual pieces at school for 10 cents a pop.

"I didn't have any money and my mother, who was a school teacher, gave me the seed money to buy the bag and then made a math lesson out of it. We counted up all the pieces and calculated how many I've have to sell and at what price in order to make any money. I had to pay her back the seed money out of my first earnings. Then I had to have enough to buy a second bag to keep the whole operation going. I think that started off my entrepreneur instincts. I learned a lesson then for life."

The years between the salt water taffy experience and graduating from college included many odd jobs as a newspaper passer, baby sitter, catering assistant, curb sign painter, Christmas present wrapper and sales clerk.

When she was a senior in high school she started her own house cleaning service.

"I used to clean my college professor's houses, and when I graduated, I passed that business on to my sister, and that's how she paid her way through college," said Hatfield.

### Bad career move leads to success

After moving to Alpharetta shortly after graduation, Hatfield began working at the Atlanta Athletic Club as a personal trainer and then programs coordinator.

Over a five-year period at the club she built a large local client base of both professional and non-professional athletes. She developed fitness and rehab programs and create and directed the club's events, youth camps and executive personal training programs.

In March 1998 she left the club and attempted to have a "real job" in the corporate workplace, selling mortgages behind a desk and computer.

"I hated it. I cried every night. I was so used to exercising that out of necessity I walked the stairs in my office building whenever I got a break."

Hatfield's training instincts took over and before she knew it, she had her co-workers joining in for 20-minute sessions, instead of taking coffee or smoke breaks.

"We'd walk the stairs or use exercise bands. As a trainer I know a lot of exercises that can make a difference in just 20 minutes without getting sweaty and hot."

The sales job lasted only three months, but it gave Hatfield the idea for her first company – Fitworks, Inc.

"We provide North Fulton businesses and organizations 20-minute fitness breaks, personal training, fitness classes, lunch and learn seminars, health screenings, massage and fitness center design and installation.

Local clients include ChoicePoint and Ryland Homes and this business continues on even as NiteSweatz grows nationally and internationally.

"I've always looked for where the need was and how I could fill it. I think that's a good sign of an entrepreneur, looking for where you can use your talents and create revenue."

In October 2005 Hatfield had her first child, a son named Jack.

"I hope I can instill some of [my work ethic] into my son. Obviously, I want to indulge him and get him the right education – all the things that my mom wanted for me, but you also need a work ethic, and my son will definitely work. It's so important and I think kids are losing that."

Hatfield's plans for the rest of year include a hopeful guest spot on Oprah.

"She doesn't know it yet, but I will be on her show this year," said Hatfield smiling.