

BIZ BUZZ

by Harry Zimbler



Sleepless in State College?

As she made her way through her medical residency, Wei-Shin Lai had one problem: getting back to sleep after waking in the middle of the night. As they say, necessity is the mother of invention, so Lai decided to create headphones that were comfortable and offered high-quality speakers.

Together with her fiancé, Jason Wolfe, the couple created a new company in the Zion area of Centre County. It's called SleepPhones and the company markets its helpful products throughout the United States and internationally on its Web site. Lai serves as CEO and Wolfe as CTO (chief technology officer).

In addition to their new business, which appears to be on the verge of a major success, the partners both work for Penn State. She is a medical doctor who treats students at the university's health center. He is a software developer for Educational Technology Services. "We manufacture about 200 to 300 SleepPhones each month," says Lai. "They work in a way similar to hypnosis. We call them 'pajamas for our ears.'"

In addition to the headphones, the package—which sells for \$59.95—includes an instruction booklet, a small bag of lavender and a CD with sounds and binaural beats to induce the brain to sleep. "The binaural beats help slow down the brainwaves," Lai explains. "Our product really helps people get to sleep. And we think we have reached a great niche market. We have had a lot of fun and it has been a great learning experience."

The entire enterprise—with patent-pending on the SleepPhones—was completely self-financed. As a medical doctor, as well as an entrepreneur, Lai recommends keeping devices out of the ear canals. "I designed this product for comfort and for safety. It works well for side sleepers, too." You can check out SleepPhones by visiting the company's Web site at www.sleepphones.com.

They are also available for purchase at Tadpole Crossing, on the corner of Beaver and Allen streets. More than a gift shop, Tadpole Crossing is an entertaining retail experience. Owner Jodi Cook was happy to offer Wei-Shin Lai shelf space in her store. "They sell very well here and they are locally made products," Cook says. Since taking over the business nearly four years ago, Cook has worked diligently to offer local products whenever possible. That's why you'll find goodies like Tait Farm chutneys, jellies and pancake mixes, Tug Hollow Honey and other local goods.

Although some think of Tadpole Crossing as a store equipped for kids, Cook is quick to point out that there is something for everyone in the store. "We also have hand-painted clothing by Natalia Pilato," Cook says. Shoppers who find their way to Tadpole Crossing are in for a treat. It takes more than one visit to really see what is available for sale there. "I would encourage people to come downtown," says Cook. "We are within a short walk of three parking garages and there's always a lot going on here. In downtown State College you can eat, go to a show, get an ice cream and shop at some very unique little shops."

And don't forget the kids. Cook has set aside a warm and welcoming area for the children to sit and play or watch a video.

"I enjoy meeting new people everyday," says Cook. "I also enjoy searching for unique prospects to sell in the store. And I think people are always looking for things that are made locally." You can visit the store's Web site at www.tadpolecrossing.com. —SZM

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