

# INVENTORS

THE MAGAZINE FOR IDEA PEOPLE >

DIGEST

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## THE FUTURE OF FABRICS

Spiders, Grass & Nanotubes  
Behold the Brave New U.S. Textile Industry

### TAKE NO PRISONERS

Beyond Jail Lights, One Company  
Opens Doors to Inventors

### INFOMERCIAL THIS!

'I Hired the Naked Cowboy,  
But I'm Still Singing the Blues'

### NO WHINING

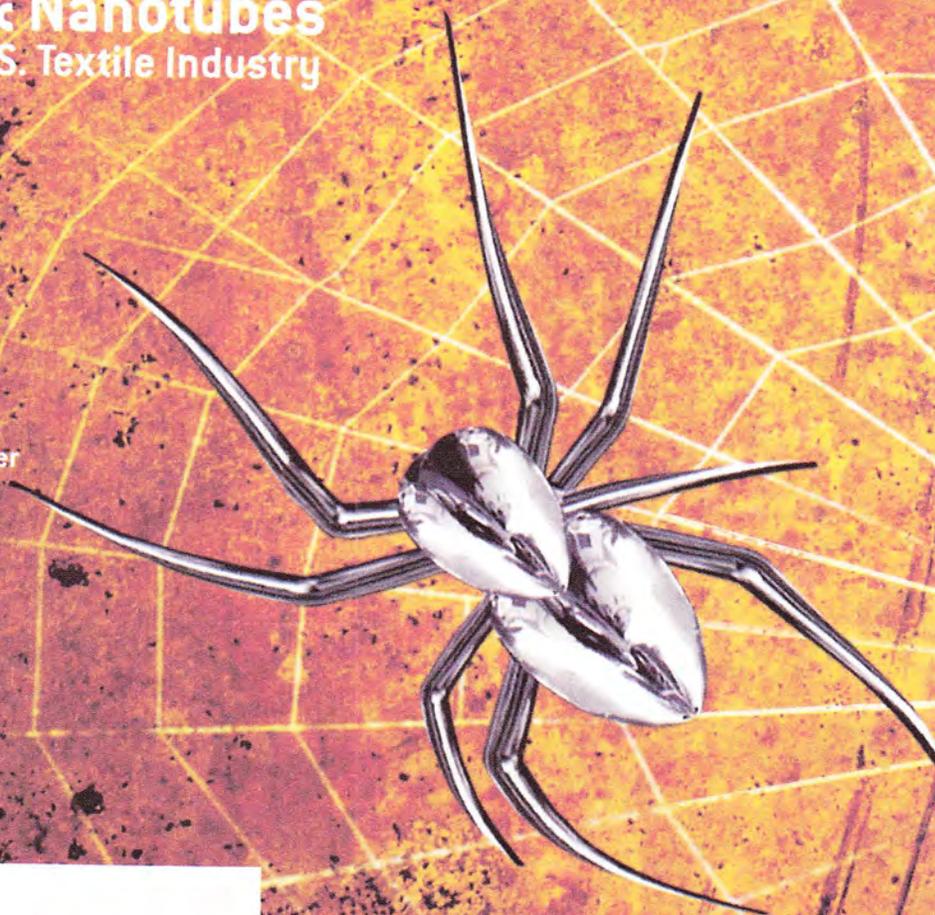
How the Recession Turned a Sommelier  
into a Sports Toy Inventor

### SNATCHING DEFEAT FROM VICTORY

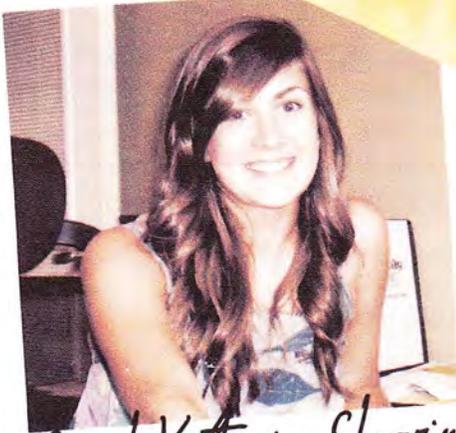
A Patent Attorney's Catalog of  
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### PATENTLY SILLY

A Little Book with Big Laughs  
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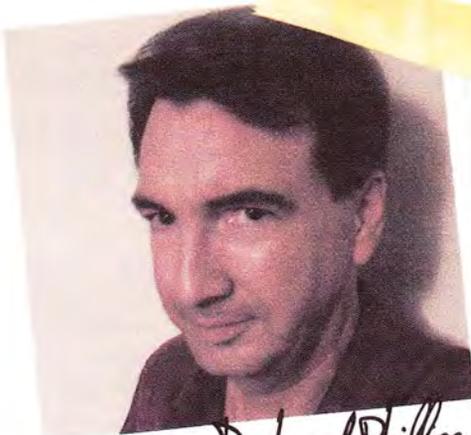
Sarah Katherine Shearin

**Sarah Katherine Shearin** wraps up her final year at the **University of South Carolina** this fall. The North Carolina native plans to use her Gamecock **public relations degree** to be the eyes, ears and voice to the professional community. She goes by Sarah Katherine, no hyphen, which we think is cool. She jumped at the chance to write in this month's issue about Andrew Arcovio, who turned to inventing with a passion when the recession forced him to sell his upscale restaurant.



Trevor Lambert

One of our editors, after reviewing **Trevor Lambert's** piece for this month's *Pro Bono* section, said, "This guy needs to have this discussion personally with every inventor I deal with." High praise indeed for the **president of Lambert & Lambert Inc.**, a contingency-fee based licensing firm in St. Paul, Minn. Lambert shows how some inventors he knows have snatched defeat from the jaws of victory. He's also the **author** of the new book, *Invent Secrets*. Visit [www.inventsecrets.com](http://www.inventsecrets.com)



Richard Phillips

**Inventor-entrepreneur Richard Phillips** perfected his product by shooting his nephew repeatedly in the chest. We don't necessarily recommend this means of prototype testing. But in Phillips' case, it worked. He writes about his No Surrender paintball protection vest in this month's installment of *First Person*. As his nephew can attest, developing a commercially viable product can be painful. Visit [www.isuri.com](http://www.isuri.com)

**Eddie Tolchin**, aka "**The Sourcing Lady**," is an **international trade consultant** with 35 years of experience, a licensed **U.S. customs broker**, and **co-author** of *Sourcing Smarts: Keeping it Simple with China Sourcing and Manufacturing*. Her work has appeared in these pages from time to time, most recently in the September issue (*Woodstock Revisited*). This month, she profiles the inventor of Wallots, a mix-and-match ladies wallet. Visit [www.egtglobaltrading.com](http://www.egtglobaltrading.com)



Eddie Tolchin

# INVENTORS

DIGEST

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FIRST PERSON  
No Pain No Surrender

Photo by Inventors Digest

# A STYLE CHANGE FOR YOUR POCKET CHANGE

WHEN FASHIONS COLLIDE, WALLOTS KEEP YOU COLOR COORDINATED

BY EDIE TOLCHIN

Listen up, fashionistas. It's easy to coordinate your shoe color with your purse. Say you have a fuchsia sandal and a matching fuchsia handbag. But you have a very non-matching lime-green wallet. What to do, what to do...

Ask Las Vegas native Shannon Greenfield, an employee in the accounting division of the City of Las Vegas for nearly 20 years. Shannon, 37, came up with the idea of a removable wallet insert with interchangeable wallet skins in 2005.

"It was a combination of my own frustration of not having time to change my wallet each time I changed my handbag," says Greenfield, "and my observation of other women who obviously took time to match their handbag with their outfit, yet often revealed worn or clashing wallets."

She thought a wallet should allow you to easily change the outer appearance of a wallet without removing the contents. So she invented the patent-pending Wallots.

"Wallots provide women with the flexibility and ease of changing our wallet as often as we change our handbag," Greenfield says.

The product works by using a series of snap fasteners strategically positioned on the exterior section of the insert and interior section of the wallet skin. It allows the removable insert to be detached from one wallet skin and inserted into another wallet skin of a different color without removing any of the contents.

The first step was to create a prototype. Greenfield searched the Thomas Register to locate small leather goods manufacturers in the United States.

She contacted several companies and sent

drawings along with product specifications, to no avail. She tried to secure prototyping and production domestically. But either it was too costly, they didn't have the resources, couldn't meet timelines or did not work with small projects.

Ultimately, Greenfield made her first prototypes by taking a traditional wallet and removing the interior compartments. She then hand-stitched liners and positioned the snaps. It took two weeks and lots of trial and error to produce 10 working prototypes.

Shannon contacted me through an inventor's resource Web site she frequently visited. She provided several prototypes and product specifications, which I arranged to have sent to manufacturers in China for quotes and product samples.

After selecting a company to work with, we began receiving samples. We went back and forth with changes and adjustments until we were sure that we had a viable and quality product. Her first order was delivered in October 2007.

Greenfield believes the main pitfall in dealing with a factory in China is the language barrier, which can be frustrating when communicating product specifications and enhancements. However, she believes the biggest advantage is pricing, which in her case was about one-third of what it would cost to manufacture in the United States.

Initial market research included several informal focus groups consisting of active and fashion-conscious women, her target market.

The results were overwhelmingly favorable.

However, in December 2007, Greenfield's



first attempt at selling Wallots proved to be disappointing. She and her best friend, Darcell Hutchinson, prepared for a highly anticipated Christmas season sales extravaganza at their church. Multiple vendors signed up for the event with various items for sale, such as custom-made jewelry, artwork and self-decorated apparel.

The event was projected to attract church members and community shoppers. They stayed up late into the night preparing an ornate display and stocking, literally, hundreds of Wallots. The day had arrived as they frantically tied up loose ends—table decorations, brochures, product arrangement, office supplies, and logs to keep in touch with customers.

But Mother Nature had other plans.

1. WASH AND WEAR FABRIC
2. ONLINE SHOPPING
3. LUGGAGE ON WHEELS
4. BIKINI
5. PANTS FOR WOMEN
6. DENIM
7. CASUAL FRIDAYS
8. PUSH-UP BRA
9. LITTLE BLACK DRESS

10. THE '60S - HIPPIE LOOK
11. CREDIT CARD
12. FULL-LEG PANTY HOSE
13. SEPARATES DRESSING
14. LYCRA
15. RALPH LAUREN
16. POLYESTER
17. COTTON T-SHIRT
18. BACKPACK

19. KHAKIS
20. DRYER
21. MINISKIRT
22. GIORGIO ARMANI
23. THE '70S - DISCO LOOK
24. SPORTS BRA
25. THE PREPPY LOOK

"An unpredictable downpour eclipsed the sales event," Hutchinson says. "The tiring preparations and optimism were to no avail. The evening, along with our high hopes, deteriorated with very low consumer attendance and dismal weather conditions. We packed up and returned home with a truckload of product."

Fast forward to INPEX, June 2008, in Pittsburgh. INPEX is billed as the nation's largest inventor trade show. Enter Wendi Cooper, CEO and creative director of C Spot Run Productions. She creates marketing positioning for her clients.

"At the end of the day (inventors and marketing companies) need each other – for neither one should take advantage of the other – but understand the value that each brings to the table," Cooper says. While a two percent royalty may seem meager to an inventor, "two percent of a million is much more than 10 percent of nothing," Cooper says.

Cooper saw Wallots at INPEX ([www.inpex.com](http://www.inpex.com)) during a Direct Response TV panel review.

Although nixed by her peers, after some trial and error, Cooper pitched the idea herself to AllStar Marketing, who took the pitch directly to Buxton – the accessories giant – that sells via Homeshopping Network (HSN) and Direct Response Television (DRTV).

Bingo!

AllStar Marketing is the exclusive partner with Buxton for the highly successful Buxton Organizer.

"I'm thrilled to work with AllStar," says Greenfield, "because they have had tremendous success, most recently with Snuggies, Patch Perfect and TopsyTurvy."

The plan is to test Wallots on HSN late this year, then create a short-form direct response commercial similar to that of the Buxton Organizer. Because Greenfield's licensing agreement is non-exclusive, she can sell under the Wallots brand as well. Projected sales, as with anything, are difficult to determine, especially in this economic climate.

However, according to MarketResearch.com,

the total domestic demand for the women's handbag and purse manufacturing industry in 2008 was \$3.1 billion. So Greenfield is confident with a successful test on HSN, her invention could sell several million units.

She learned that a successful inventor can't be a people pleaser.

"When hiring professionals, make sure they can suit your needs, and tell them exactly what you want," Greenfield says. "Don't be afraid of offending someone by asking for references and always obtain an estimated completion date."

She also feels you should avoid naysayers, and surround yourself with positive people or other entrepreneurs who can relate to your triumphs as well as your struggles.

"For me," Greenfield says, "this has been a journey of 1,000 miles and I reached each mile marker with prayer, meditation, hard work and determination." ■

Visit [www.wallots.com](http://www.wallots.com)

**WALLOTS COME IN BLACK, BROWN, RED AND CAMEL. FUTURE COLORS WILL INCLUDE SHADES OF PINK, BLUE, PURPLE, WHITE AND METALLIC.**

## MANUFACTURING

# TAKE NO PRISONERS

SKOL ADDS ROOFTOP GARDENS TO ITS LINE OF JAILHOUSE LIGHT FIXTURES

BY MIKE DRUMMOND

In search for new product ideas, the Chicago metal fabricator is opening its doors to inventors.

For more than 20 years, Skol carved itself a niche manufacturing light fixtures for prisons.

Making lights functional yet inaccessible to inmates is imperative for prison and civilian safety, a fact recently underscored by the increasing problem of convicts smuggling, hiding and using cell phones in the slammer. In at least one episode, an inmate arranged the assassination of a witness. Other reported crimes linked to prisoners with mobile phones have prompted states and the federal government to restrict cell phone coverage at penitentiaries and increase penalties for possession of the devices.

While Skol, a Chicago-based sheet metal fabricator, has found prison lighting to be a steady business, the ongoing recession and contraction of manufacturing has compelled the small company to think outside the poky.

This year as part of a larger effort to make eco-friendly fixtures, the



Skol, a sheet metal fabricator, is making rooftop planter boxes for new and existing buildings.