

Pedorthics Purpose

WOMAN'S EXTRA-WIDE SHOE LINE PROVIDES COMFORT WITH STYLE FOR PEOPLE WITH SWELLING ISSUES **BY EDITH G. TOLCHIN**

I'VE ALWAYS had a shoe fetish! Take me to any department store, and I'll head straight to the shoe department.

But as people age—or for people with foot issues—comfortable, attractive shoe style selections diminish. Laura Oden of Anchorage, Alaska, has invented a solution.

Edith G. Tolchin (EGT): Tell us about yourself and the salient feature of your shoes.

Laura Oden (LO): I have lived in Anchorage for the past 30 years. Pandere Shoes is my first and only invention.

I had cancer treatment as a teenager that left me with a 40-year struggle with lymphedema. In my case, one foot and leg are chronically swollen.

Many millions of people all over the world deal with similar swelling from a host of causes. Sometimes it's temporary, like foot surgery; other times, it's chronic and can be very debilitating. Shoes are essential for mobility and dignity, and can have a huge impact on quality of life.

The idea for Pandere Shoes came from my lifelong battle with lymphedema. Foot swelling made finding comfortable shoes a nightmare! Traditional orthopedic shoes, while targeted for older feet and swelling, are often unattractive and often don't provide much comfort.

Pandere Shoes fills this gap by offering aesthetically beautiful, comfortable footwear that stretch and have adjustability in the key areas in which people have swelling: the ankle, midfoot and toe area.

I was not interested in wearing orthopedic shoes at age 35. I feel the same way at age 60. I want to look and feel good in something that allows me to be active all day, every day.

EGT: Can you describe the various foot conditions your shoes accommodate?

LO: Our shoes are primarily designed for swelling—including conditions like lymphedema,

lipedema and edema from congestive heart failure. However, it didn't take long before we discovered that our shoes also work very well for bunions, hammer toes, pregnancy, diabetes, neuropathy, gout, arthritis, high arches, and for those with wide or sensitive feet.

EGT: When did you start selling the shoes?

LO: We launched just before the holidays in 2018. This was nearly two years from when we began ideation and prototyping.

I was itchy to launch for fear of someone else stepping into our space. But the truth is that the depth of knowledge that you've honed through extensive ideation and prototyping can't be easily replicated. That fear is usually overblown.

On the other hand, you don't want to let perfection be the enemy of good. Finding the right balance is a struggle for any entrepreneur.

EGT: How many different styles are you selling, where are you selling them, and what is the pricing?

LO: We have iterated 19 different styles. Each new style incorporated feedback from the prior shoes.

Unfortunately, there is no way to know which shoes will work best until you get them on people's feet. Now that we've tested a lot of styles, we're focusing on the styles that fit the most people—like the Two Step, the Globetrotter and our slide, the Clog. These styles have a larger delta of expansion and accommodate both larger and smaller volume all in one shoe size.

We sell on our website and through a growing number of retail shoe stores throughout the country. Our prices are average for pedorthic footwear—from \$130 to \$180.

We don't sell on Amazon, because we want to cultivate a direct relationship and connection with our customers. We often chat with them directly to learn more about their circumstances and struggles. You can't do this on Amazon! Amazon

actively prevents any relationship with a customer.

We have also explored other channels. For example, we put our final clearance items on Poshmark.

EGT: What are the various materials used for the shoes?

LO: Our signature, soft, durable nubuck leather sets us apart from other pedorthic brands. We also use strategically placed stretch materials like Lycra or neoprene both inside and outside to provide style and functionality.

Our shoes can expand up to 3cm of volume, and this is a key element of our patent.

EGT: Where are you manufacturing?

LO: We initially manufactured in Portugal and are now exploring options in Mexico or India to reduce production costs. This will allow us to move forward faster with more shoe development.

EGT: Are your shoes patented?

LO: Yes, we have a U.S. utility patent, and we're awaiting approval in Canada. We worked with an IP firm specializing in footwear patents.

The process was expensive, but it freed me up to focus on other aspects of the business. We've got trademarks, too, and we've also got trade secrets.

I think trade secrets often get revealed or further developed after the business launches and you're getting feedback from customers. Sometimes, trade secrets are part of the discovery and iteration process. These can be just as valuable as IP.

EGT: Have you done any crowdfunding?

LO: Yes. Lots! We launched two Kickstarters, one Indiegogo, and participated in two Kiva funding rounds.

I'm a fan of crowdfunding. It's a useful tool for early-stage inventors. It provides both cash and market validation. Cash is always the hard part for an early-stage business.



EGT: Any plans for different styles or complementary accessories?

LO: Yes! We've just added beautiful Italian leather wallets and are working on the next shoe width that we need—XXW.

We also offer the most wonderful bamboo socks, which are very soft. They have a large stretch capacity at the top and additional cushion under the foot for added comfort.

EGT: What advice would you offer to inventors contemplating manufacturing a footwear item?

LO: My primary advice is, don't underestimate the financial requirements of launching a shoe company. It's not just the initial cash to produce the first round of production. The footwear manufacturing cycle demands you to predict your needs and place orders 6 to 9 months in advance.

Success in this industry hinges on having the agility to gather feedback, make corrections and accept that sometimes early styles may not always hit it out of the park.

Keep iterating. That's how you get where you need to be. 🍷

Laura Oden's lifelong battle with lymphedema and swelling feet were the impetus for Pandere Shoes.

Details: pandereshoes.com

Edith G. Tolchin has written for *Inventors Digest* since 2000 (edietolchin.com/portfolio). She is the author of several books, including "Secrets of Successful Women Inventors" (<https://a.co/d/fAGlvZJ>) and "Secrets of Successful Inventing" (<https://a.co/d/8dafJd6>).



IN COOPERATION WITH



UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

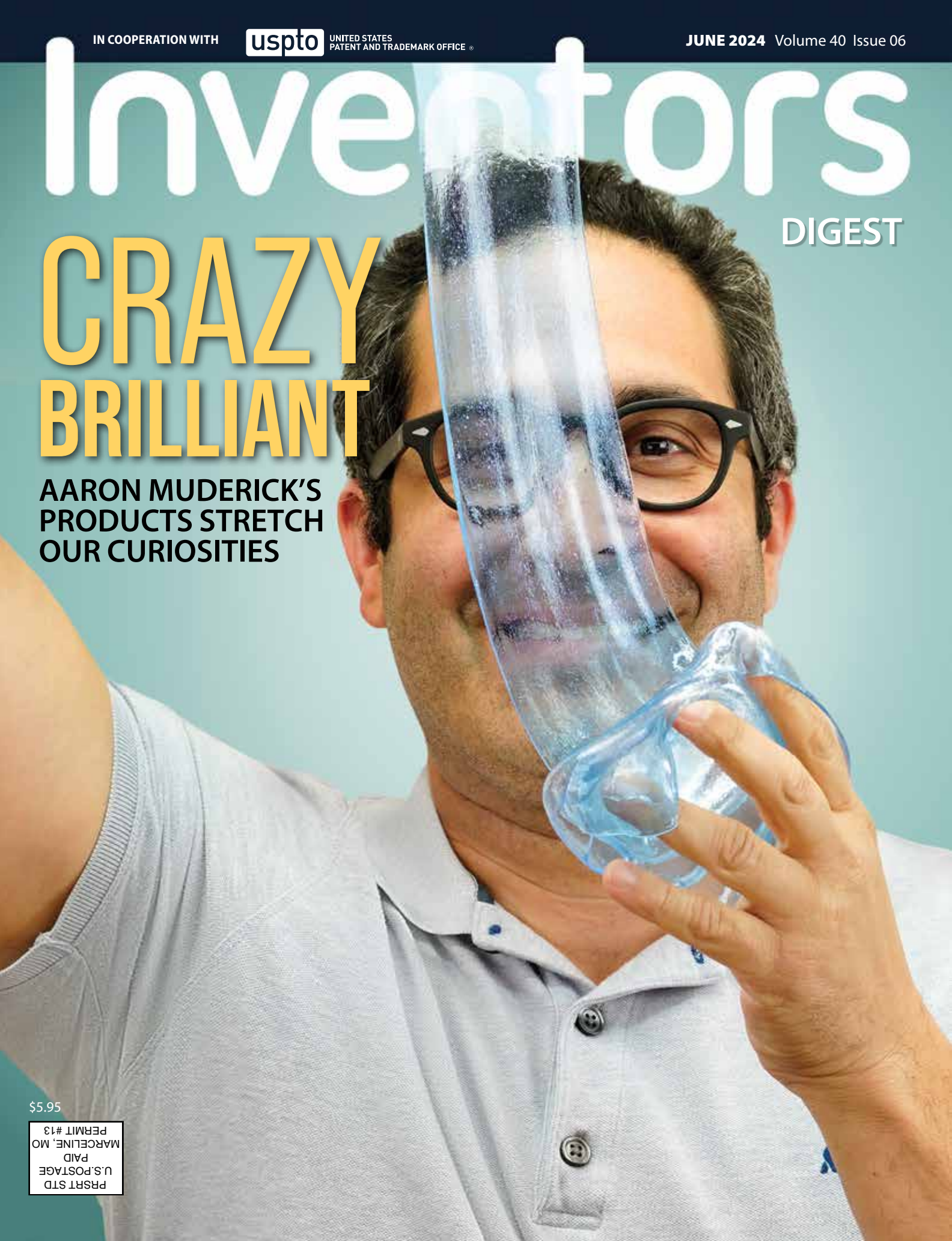
JUNE 2024 Volume 40 Issue 06

Inventors

DIGEST

CRAZY BRILLIANT

AARON MUDERICK'S
PRODUCTS STRETCH
OUR CURIOSITIES



\$5.95

PRRST STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
MARCELINE, MO
PERMIT #13

Contents

June 2024 Volume 40 Issue 6

18



20



12



24

Features

- 20 **10 Questions With ...**
Christopher Guerrero,
United Inventors Association VP
- 24 **Nutty About Putty**
'Crazy Aaron' Muderick
Stretches Our Creativity

Inventor Spotlight

- 18 **Pedorthics Purpose**
Woman's Extra-Wide Shoes
for Health

Departments

- 4 **Your USPTO**
2024 NIHF Inductees Honored
- 8 **Editor's Note**
Countdown to 12 Million Patents
- 9 **Everybody's Talking**
Niko Moon Says Thanks to ID
- 10 **Bright Ideas**
Innovation That Shines
- 12 **Time Tested**
The No-Fly Zone
- 14 **Lander Zone**
First Human Invention
- 16 **Social Hour**
Working With Influencers
- 32 **Guest Insight**
Think Positioning, Not Branding
- 34 **Think Marketing**
The Affordability Barrier
- 36 **Meant to Invent**
Licensing Concepts Faster
- 38 **Prototyping**
Ouch! That One Stung
- 40 **IP Market**
Goosing the Greed
- 44 **Eye on Washington**
SCOTUS Ruling an Iffy Victory?
- 46 **Inventiveness**
Focus on the Fun and Fascinating

They Said **What?**

- 12 The most interesting thing about this flat, dull-looking device is the science behind it.
- 25 The world would be a better place if people had something squishy in their hands.
- 45 The Supreme Court does it once again, with a clear-as-mud ruling ...