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HEALTH NEWS

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BUSINESS PROFILE / GETTING STARTED

Balls of relief for sore backs



Jim Davis / Staff

Cheryl Zemont-Payne says lying on the balls provides "a hurt-so-good feeling."

Cheryl Zemont-Payne

Age: 40
Title: President, Healthy Body Products Inc.

Masseuse sells knobby devices on the Internet

By David Wichner
ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Business Profiles is a weekly feature about Tucson businesspeople - those in charge, starting out, keeping things running or hiring in today's work force.

As a massage therapy student, Cheryl Zemont-Payne found deep massage relieved the knots of tension in her upper back muscles.

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Trying without success to get that relief on her own by lying on bottles and tennis balls, she wound up fashioning a knobby ball of oven-baked clay she bought at a nearby craft store.

Thus was born the first prototype for the Healthy Body Ball, a 4-inch-wide rubber ball with 10 protruding nubs that allow users to work out so-called "trigger points" in their muscles by pressing against them.

"Chiropractors will have you use a tennis ball, but what I like about this is it has little thumbs you can press on," said Zemont-Payne, who recently began marketing her massage balls on the Internet. "It's a hurt-so-good feeling."

Zemont-Payne said her invention is based on the concept of "trigger-point therapy," a term coined by Dr. Janet Travell, White House physician to President John F. Kennedy, and Dr. David Simons.

While trigger-point therapy has met with some skepticism in the mainstream medical community, trigger points are recognized as a form of muscle inflammation. Health insurance in some cases will pay for injections to ease trigger-point pain.

Zemont-Payne contends untreated trigger points are behind many misdiagnosed ailments and can lead to a cycle of pain and spasms.

Zemont-Payne, a massage therapy graduate of the Desert Institute of the Healing Arts in Tucson, said her idea was to give people a way to work out trigger points on their own, without costly therapy.

She also sees a market ready for alternatives to pain pills.

"Baby boomers are tired of the pill pushing - they want more alternative therapies," she said. But it's one thing to have a good idea, and quite another to bring it to market.

Zemont-Payne works as an office manager for a construction company and practices as a licensed massage therapist with Focus Healing Arts Center. It took her years to find the right design, experimenting with everything from plastic balls stuck with plastic pegs to a golf ball with wooden dowels.

With the help of a local invention agency, she submitted a U.S. patent application about two years ago. She still is waiting for final approval.

Meanwhile, she was busy building a final prototype, spending eight months finding a mold maker. She figures she's sunk about \$40,000 of her own money into the product.

After signing on a silent investor, Zemont-Payne now has an inventory of 5,000 balls, molded in Taiwan and packaged locally by disabled workers at Goodwill Industries.

Working from her home on the Northwest Side, Zemont-Payne is selling the Healthy Body Balls for \$22 on her company's Web site, www.healthybodyball.com, and at ProgressiveDoctors.com, with little marketing or advertising so far.

A physician affiliated with the University of Arizona said they eased his neck pain.

"It's always better to have the loving, healing touch of a human hand, but if you can't, these are good," said Dr. Lewis Mehl-Madrona, coordinator of integrated psychiatry and systemic medicine for the UA's Program in Integrative Medicine. "Anything that helps people take care of themselves is good."

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