



## Business

### Devising a mighty barrier

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Barrington entrepreneur Gary Goldberg developed a fabric that blocks allergens. His company, CleanBrands LLC, now sells its products nationally in Bed Bath and Beyond.

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EAST PROVIDENCE — A father's duty is to his children.

A simple enough credo for most men to follow.

Tie their shoes, tuck them into bed, take them to the beach on a nice summer day.

But what happens when their needs are more complex?

Sometimes, a business grows.

In 2004, Gary Goldberg's oldest son, then 4, was having difficulty breathing at night. His problem resulted in several visits to the emergency room at Hasbro Children's Hospital. Eventually, his son was diagnosed with an allergy to dust mites.

As doctors sorted out what was happening to his son, Goldberg and his wife, Elizabeth, learned about the severity and costs associated with breathing problems.

The Barrington man told one of the doctors: "I think there's some textile science I could bring to the problem."

Goldberg, 38, has spent most of his life in the textile business.

He worked at Duro Industries, a company his grandfather co-founded in Fall River 60 years ago.

"That's where I really learned textiles," he said.

After his father sold the business in 1997, the younger Goldberg started a company that provides designs and manufactures products on contract at factories he owned in Mexico and Vietnam. He also acquired a Woonsocket business that produces performance outerwear.

Prompted by his son's illness, Goldberg started researching dust mites and allergens.

He found a wide "disconnect," as he called it, between the small size of dust-mite waste and the large size of pores in fabrics used to cover pillows and mattresses intended for allergy protection. In some cases, the pores were 10 times larger than the waste, allowing it to easily pass through and collect in pillows and bedding and, from there, into people's respiratory systems.

"Let's set a new hurdle," he suggested.

He set out to find a manufacturing process that could create fabric with pores no larger than one micron — one millionth of a meter.

About three years ago, he succeeded, creating a fabric technology that's able to block even the tiniest micro-toxins. He found a South Korean manufacturer who could make the fabric cost effectively.

He started calling retailers to find ones willing to carry products using the technology, now dubbed MicronOne.

Cold calling, as the sales effort is called, "is just the most humiliating [task]," Goldberg said.

But the blunt tactic can pay off.

Goldberg managed to connect with a buyer at home-furnishings retailer Bed Bath and Beyond, who liked the products.

The buyer ordered enough pillow and bedding encasements for 30 of the chain's stores.

The products sold well enough that they are now in all of the nearly 900 Bed Bath and Beyond stores.

After that deal, he found investors willing to put money into his fledgling business.

"A lot of the entrepreneurs and founders hold on to their businesses," he said, clasping his hands tightly in front of himself.

Unable to give up control, they spurn investors who could help their businesses grow. Starved of capital, the businesses often die, he said.

Goldberg didn't want to make that mistake, he said. Eventually, he secured an investment from Northbridge Equity Partners, of Montreal, Canada.

The undisclosed investment helped him hire workers, buy inventory, broaden his products and connect with potential customers.

A consultant helped him come up with a name for his new company and CleanBrands LLC was born.

It recently was among a group of companies that received money from the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation's Small Business Loan Fund. CleanBrands received \$500,000.

Now sold under the BeneSleep, CleanRest and HealthZZZ brand labels, products using the MicronOne technology can also be found at discounter Wal-Mart and on JetBlue airline flights.

CleanBrands supplies JetBlue Airways Corp. with a kit including a pillow and travel blanket, which the airline sells for \$7 to passengers on flights longer than two hours. The kit includes a \$5 coupon to Bed Bath and Beyond.

"They had such a well-defined need and we had such a well-defined product, they just fit together," Goldberg said of the JetBlue deal. After supplying an initial order of 100,000 kits last month, Goldberg predicts JetBlue will want 800,000 kits annually.

"You know what you forget about airlines," he said. "They work every day."

The 15-person CleanBrands, which moved about 18 months ago from Bristol to East Providence, is now readying similar kits for sale in December on Canadian discount airlines WestJet.

With a pair of airlines as clients, the company is concentrated on landing clients in other parts of the travel industry, he said.

"We need to penetrate the hotels," Goldberg said.

From there, he said, it will be on to drapery makers, flooring companies and furniture manufacturers.

"We've got to get in everybody's home," Goldberg said.

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