

Couple's invention featured on NBC's 'Today' show



PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED BY FRANK AND JULIA SHERRON
Julia (left) and Frank Sherron's homemade invention was shown on NBC's 'Today' show.

BY SETH STRATTON
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When Frank Sherron, former president and chief operating officer of LSB *TheBank*, voluntarily stepped aside from its merged successor company, NewBridge Bank, in September 2007, he was unsure of his future.

"This gives me and Julia (his wife) and our family an opportunity to step back and evaluate what might be next," Sherron said at the time. "We're going to explore all the opportunities available."

Little did he and Julia know that those explored opportunities — derived from a conversation over drinks at a beach house — could land the Sherrons' homemade invention on NBC's "Today" show. But that's exactly what happened.

Frank, a Lexington native, and Julia, from Fayetteville, moved to Moore County after Frank's 17 years with LSB. When he left the bank, he knew two things: Whatever his next venture would be, it would be with Julia; and he was going to have fun at whatever that would be.

In the summer of 2008, while at a family coastal home at Topsail Beach, Julia was having a glass of chilled wine when after a few minutes it became warm, and condensation began to settle

in. She said it would be great if her wine glass could stay insulated the way a coozie keeps a beer cold, and the Woozie was born, Frank recalled.

They researched the product and began their due diligence, filing trademark and patent paperwork to make sure they retain the rights to the Woozie name and idea. The Woozie is essentially an adjustable — depending on the glass size — neoprene sleeve that slips over a wine glass to keep it insulated and prevent the glass from breaking in the event it tips over. They come in multiple colors and can be customized and monogrammed.

Frank and Julia found a company to produce the Woozies overseas, but they have a fulfillment center in the eastern part of North Carolina to ship and create gift-bag orders, their monogrammer works out of Kernersville, their printing is done in Raleigh, and the wine glasses, which are optional, are made in the U.S. Frank said he tried to keep as much of the business local as he could.

The husband-and-wife business partnership drove to Atlanta to participate in

WANT A WOOSIE?

Woozies are available at Childress Vineyards and Lanier's Hardware in Lexington and Quality Hardware in Thomasville. For more information, log on to www.mywoozie.com.

their first gift trade show in January. They were nervous to find out the public's reaction to their pet project and were relieved to find others thought the Woozie was a great invention. They shipped their first order right before Easter and have been on the road promoting the product at gift conventions and trade shows ever since.

Talking from his hotel room in Philadelphia on Monday, Frank said he and Julia went head-first into the wine-accessory industry not knowing what to expect but have been "blessed with divine intervention" to meet several people to help guide them on their journey.

"I'm so glad we thought of this," Frank said. "We're hoping that one day they'll say that 'the Woozie is sweeping the nation.'"

While back at Topsail Beach for the Memorial Day weekend, a niece of a friend

of the Sherrons loved the Woozie idea and brought some back with her to New York. She had some connections to NBC's "Today" show and as Frank put it "placed a few Woozies on some desks to see what might happen."

Weeks went by without a call until Frank was driving to Atlanta for another show when he received a call from a producer for the fourth hour of the "Today" show hosted by Kathie Lee Gifford and Hoda Kotb. The producer told Frank the Woozie would be featured in a product segment with the two hosts July 10, in just two days.

Frank "began to scramble," making sure the Web site's store locator function was working and the Web site could handle the traffic. When he replays the show's segment in his head now, he said it feels surreal, like someone had played a prank on him. The hosts complimented the product, made jokes with it and when asked what her job would be outside of television, Gifford replied that she would prefer to be an official "Woozie tester."

That day, Frank said the Web site had more than 37,000 hits, and he received

more than 75 e-mails from people who wanted the Woozie but couldn't find it in their area. The Woozie is now sold in more than 18 states with an ever-growing network of retailers.

But the couple isn't slowing down; Frank said they have at least four new prototypes of other products they are working on and have hired at least one part-time worker, who Frank jokingly said has been working 60 hours a week to keep up with all the new orders and isn't very part time anymore.

"The satisfaction I get is when someone e-mails or calls Julia to thank her for making such a unique product. They always say, 'I wish I'd thought of that,'" Frank said.

Several thousand of Woozies have been sold in the first six months of its inception. The Woozies can be found locally at Childress Vineyards and Lanier's Hardware in Lexington and Quality Hardware in Thomasville.

For more information, log on to www.mywoozie.com.

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