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Alabama grads' company focuses on being green

By Mary Cypress Howell Special to the Tuscaloosa News
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Growing up in Carbon Hill and attending the University of Alabama together, Tana Collins and Stephanie Collins share more than their last name. Through the 20 years they have been best friends, the women said they dreamed of starting a business together.



Submitted photo

University of Alabama graduates Stephanie Collins, left, and Tana Collins, right, launched their own environmental products company, Envicorp Products LLC, which is based in Houston.

This summer, that dream came true when they launched their own environmental products company, Envicorp Products LLC.

Their first product, the Envitote, is a reusable shopping bag that is designed for consumers to help reduce the use of plastic bags, according to Tana Collins, who attended UA but graduated from the University of Alabama at Birmingham in 1996. Stephanie Collins graduated from UA in 1993.

An average U.S. family uses 1,460 plastic grocery bags each year, and a cloth bag can save six plastic bags per person each week, which is roughly 300 each year, according to the Envicorp Products Web site.

"We've always been interested in the environment," Tana Collins said. "We saw the damage plastic bags are doing, and we hope [the Envitote will] change the way consumers shop in a small way."

The Envitote is 14 inches long, 9 inches wide and 9 inches deep and is made of lightweight, washable canvas. Designed by Stephanie Collins, it has an adjustable strap and side handles, and removable stiffeners so that it can be collapsed for easy storage. It sells for \$19.95.

"Its superior design is a stylish alternative to your typical reusable bag," according to the Envicorp Web site.

As they marketed their product, the women expanded to Los Angeles, where Stephanie Collins lived before they started their business in Houston, Texas.

The bag received more recognition than they expected, as Tamar Gellar, Oprah Winfrey's dog trainer, saw it and invited the business owners to help with Operation Heroes and Hounds, her non-profit organization.

Operation Heroes and Hounds is a program that gives injured members of the United States military the opportunity to coach and live with shelter dogs, according to Gellar's Web site. The intent of the program is to help veterans assimilate into every day life.

Envicorp Products is donating Envitotes and coupons for bags to participants in the program at its Collavini Wine Tasting fundraising event in Chicago on Sept. 24.

As a new company, Tana Collins said it is exciting to be involved with such a worthwhile cause — helping both troops and stray animals.

“Anytime you do something good, it comes back to you,” she said. “Plus, we both love animals.”

The two women hope their product spreads beyond Gellar’s organization, so in addition to the Envitote, Envicorp Products plans on introducing more eco-friendly products to their line. The next additions will be a recycled, insulated bag and a small produce bag.

“Our ultimate goal is to create a foundation that gives out grants to environmental projects,” Tana Collins said. “Plus, if we don’t do this now, what about our future generations?”

To buy an Envitote or get more information about Envicorp Products, visit the Web site at www.envicorp.com.

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