

Appearance on 'Oprah' May Help Tights Expand

Local maker's product spotlighted on 'must-have' segment.

By David Haldane

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The founder of a Redondo Beach startup that manufactures tights made a splash on TV last week with several appearances, including a preview of her product on the "must-haves for 2011" segment of "The Oprah Winfrey Show."

Shelby Mason's Leg Up LLC makes tights that incorporate stylish socks to keep women's feet warm when they wear boots.

The concept came to Mason several years ago when she was working for Walt Disney Co. out of Chicago and had to board an airplane bound for Fargo, N.C. Asked to remove the boots for a security inspection, Mason was embarrassed by the public disclosure that over her tights she was wearing what she calls "white ugly man socks" borrowed from her father.

"It's something every woman does," Mason insisted. "They layer socks over their tights when they wear boots; even if they don't talk about it, it's a necessity. It's embarrassing, when you take off the boots and suddenly don't look so put together anymore."

Her solution: a moisture wicking performance sock with built-in cushions, arch support and a contoured foot attached to the end of a fashionable quality tight.

After Disney transferred her to California three years ago, Mason spent \$175,000 of her own money to set up the company at her Redondo Beach home, with manufacturing contracted out to two North Carolina mills. The tights, which go for \$30 a pair, hit the market about 18 months ago. They are sold at Amazon.com, and several department stores chains including Macy's and Dillard's.

Though sales have increased dramatically, Mason said she hasn't yet broken even. But she hopes last week's appearance on "Oprah" will help put her over the top.

“I don’t know if Bootights will become a household name,” Mason said. “I’m just hoping to make women more comfortable in their boots – and I wouldn’t mind making a dollar or two in the process.”

Mason’s TV breakout came just in the nick of time. This week she involuntarily leaves her job at Disney ABC Domestic Television in Burbank, where she is vice president of western sales.

“I’m stressed and I’m excited. I’m also very hopeful,” she said. “This is Bootights or bust.”