



Beverly Bolner and Deb Bolner Prost want to keep south Texas cool.

The Spice Girls

San Antonio sisters are 2 Cool.

Deb Bolner Prost has built her entire career on helping people and companies market themselves or their products. Now she's using that expertise to market a new product of

Linda Caldwell was a corporate management whiz when Prost got to know her as a marketing client. Her husband Jim, an engineer, was with Southwest Research Institute when Linda started talking to Prost and Bolner about a partnership, and as the friends' project evolved from the idea stage to nuts-and-bolts reality, Prost says, he became so interested and involved that he, too, decided to go into it full-time.

"We were all interested in natural alternatives," Prost says. "And we women had all experienced going through menopause and hot flashes. Linda Caldwell had gone through breast cancer treatment, and with the chemo you really can't use a lot of chemicals. At the same time, market research showed us people were starting to look for more natural alternatives. There are herbs and botanicals that naturally work to mediate the effects of hot flashes, and we just started clicking on how many uses there were for a natural concoction we could use to cool down if we were standing outside in 100 degree weather, or having hot flashes."

Research showed that though the market for wet towelettes of all kinds, from baby wipes to antibacterial towelettes, was booming, there was nothing that focused on cooling. It was a "gap in the market"—one their idea might fill. That's when the real work started.

"It's a learning curve," says Prost. "Working with a lab to develop the right mix of botanicals, herbs and essential oils to create a cooling, natural formula; testing different scent combinations; refining the solution to infuse soft towelettes, finding manufacturers for the towelettes, the formula and the packaging."

All the time, the team was also refining the marketing concept. When Beverly gave her son some prototype samples for his football team to try to help them cool off on hot days, she was surprised at their enthusiastic response. More potential uses—and markets—for Cool Off kept emerging in focus groups and market studies, from cooling off at the gym to taming hot flashes.

Last fall, the partners got a major vote of confidence when retailers at a national ECRM (Effective Collaboration between Retailers and Manufacturers) meeting in Tampa voted Cool Off "Best New Product" in the show.

Since then, Prost says, several major chains have come on board. This month, Cool Off will start showing up on grocery store shelves. Sales in Tetco, Stripes and other convenience stores and drug stores will follow soon after.

After that? "I've been thinking I'd really like to take them to Iraq and Afghanistan, to the soldiers in that extreme heat," says Prost.

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her own. For the better part of four years, Prost and her four partners in It's 2 Cool Ltd have been working on a new product they've named Cool Off—a packaged towelette saturated with botanical compounds that produce a strong cooling effect on the user's skin. They call it Cool Off. And this month they plan to roll it out in stores throughout South Texas for the first time.

"I've consulted with so many companies over the years, helping them with new product development and how to be successful in marketing, so I felt like it was time to come up with something I could do for myself," say Prost.

The decision wasn't hers alone. It came through many conversations with the people who would become her partners in this enterprise—her sister Beverly Bolner, longtime friend and former client Linda Caldwell, Linda's husband Jim, and artist Dawn Gwin. Each had already carved out a career, and was looking for something new—something to call their own.

At first, the friends weren't sure what sort of product they wanted to focus on, but they knew they needed to come up with something unique. Both Prost and Bolner, who is also a dedicated yoga teacher, had serious interests in all-natural products and herbal healing. And because of their father's spice business, Bolner's Fiesta Products, Inc., they both grew up knowing about many of the herbs that are now vital components in Cool Off.

"We watched our dad [Clif Bolner] start Fiesta Spices from nothing and make it a success. Deb and I grew up with good work ethics, and we like each other, too."

In addition to her work with various corporate clients through her Prost Marketing firm, Prost has consulted on Fiesta's marketing over the years, and Bolner, who majored in Food Science and Technology at A&M, had worked in quality control and new product development for the family business for 15 years. Gwin, an accomplished graphic artist, had worked with some of Prost's clients, and the two became good friends.