

Neighbors

INSIDE: TV/ADVICE, COMICS/PUZZLES 3C-4C

IN TODAY'S IR ...

■ Beware of the bear if you're taking part in Lincoln's holiday festivities. 2C



Red Ants Pants, run by Sarah Calhoun of White Sulphur Springs, has built a worldwide following for its line of work pants for women. The company promises well-fitting pants for all shapes and sizes.

Marga Lincoln IR Staff Photographer

Women at work

Perfect fit | White Sulphur Springs business makes work pants designed to fit every woman's body

By MARGA LINCOLN
Independent Record

WHITE SULPHUR SPRINGS — Necessity may be the mother of invention, but frustration works pretty well, too.

Just ask Sarah Calhoun, who four years ago was working a fire-restoration project in California, and had to keep stopping her work to hitch up her pants.

This wasn't the first time she'd gotten antsy about her pants.

Growing up on a farm in Connecticut, Calhoun used to wear her dad's work pants hand-me-downs.

"If you stop work to pull up your pants or adjust them, it gets old very quickly," she said.

So as she fumed about her lousy-fitting pants that fateful day in California, the idea for a new business was born — Red Ants Pants.



Perfect fit | White Sulphur Springs business makes work pants designed to fit every woman's body

By MARGA LINCOLN
Independent Record

WHITE SULPHUR SPRINGS — Necessity may be the mother of invention, but frustration works pretty well, too.

Just ask Sarah Calhoun, who four years ago was working a fire-restoration project in California, and had to keep stopping her work to hitch up her pants.

This wasn't the first time she'd gotten antsy about her pants.

Growing up on a farm in Connecticut, Calhoun used to wear her dad's work pants hand-me-downs.

"If you stop work to pull up your pants or adjust them, it gets old very quickly," she said.

So as she fumed about her lousy-fitting pants that fateful day in California, the idea for a new business was born — Red Ants Pants, workwear designed for women.

Somewhat to her surprise, she's now the owner-operator of the burgeoning business, headquartered in White Sulphur Springs.

And word (and pairs) of Red Ants Pants have been dispersing around the world the past two years.

They've made it to such places as Myrtle Beach, S.C., Kaneohe, Hawaii, Maputo, Swaziland, and the Antarctic.

The pants sell by word of mouth from happy customers, as well as via the whimsical Red Ants Web site and a clever, new YouTube video.

There are also Red Ants Pants house parties swarming through neighborhood living rooms across the country, where RAP aficionados invite their friends.

And Big Sky Brewery has shown interest in partnering on house parties and other RAP events.

And then, of course, there's Calhoun's inviting storefront shop on Main Street in White Sulphur Springs.

Here you'll be greeted by Calhoun, plus Maggie the



Sarah Calhoun prepares orders of her Red Ants Pants for delivery. Calhoun says 80 percent of her business is from orders, and her clothes are shipped all over the world.

cat and Nellie the dog.

Customers drop in, plop down on the sofa for a chat, browse through the racks, and sometimes share Red Ants Pants stories.

Take Monday, when Kelli Smart of Prescott, Ariz., stopped in to tell Calhoun about attending a Hardly Strictly Bluegrass concert in San Francisco when she

noticed the man in front of her was wearing a Red Ants Pants T-shirt. She immediately struck up a conversation with him, and his response was, "You know

these pants!"

"I don't sell thru stores," said Calhoun, "only sell direct to

More V

Neighbors

IN TODAY'S IR ...

■ Beware of the bear if you're taking part in Lincoln's holiday festivities. 2C



INSIDE: TV/ADVICE, COMICS/PUZZLES 3C-4C

continued from 1C

tomers." She said 80 percent of her business is online orders.

Customers sometimes write her letters about why they love their pants.

Naomi Knapp, director of a wilderness therapy program in Idaho, wrote:

"Sarah, I literally have not worn any other pants for the last two weeks. My boyfriend surprised me with a nice dinner date the other night and he said, 'Honey, I know you really love your Red Ants Pants, but could you wear something else just for tonight?'"

What makes Red Ants Pants different?

"The big thing in the design is fit," Calhoun replied. "Fit, function and flattery."

And while most folks don't want ants in their pants, there are more and more women who want the trademark red ant on their pants.

The chocolate brown pants with the embroidered red ant logo are designed to fit all shapes — coming in 70 different sizes.

For those who ride a horse, build trail, wield a shovel, a chainsaw or a hammer — Calhoun designed these pants for you.

Made of 12-ounce-cotton canvas duck with a contoured waist, double-front knees, a reinforced seat and "lots of pockets," they fit both the worker and any tough work situation.

"One, lone red ant is

embroidered in a different place on each pair of pants," said Calhoun.

Should a RAP wearer meet up with another one sporting a red ant in the same place, they qualify to win Red Ants T-shirts.

There have been 13 matches so far.

While many customers are attracted by the product's quality, others are drawn by its clever guerrilla marketing.



Image provided

This postcard is an example of some of the clever advertising methods Red Ants Pants has used.

And some, particularly union workers, like the fact the pants are made in America.

Calhoun charges \$119 a pair, she said, so she can buy quality materials and pay fair wages to the sewing crew.

"Competition can be fierce in the clothing business. It's been a ride for sure," said the neophyte business owner, whose degree is in environmental studies, not business.

"If I'd known how challenging it would be, I would not have had the courage," said the 29-year-old entrepreneur. "My naivete gave me the courage. When you're walking in blindly, it's a lot easier."

Along the way, Calhoun had a serendipitous encounter in a Bozeman coffee shop.

While she was reading a how-to-book on starting a business, a man at a nearby table, struck up a conversation.

He happened to be Richard Siberell, who had designed clothes and done production for Patagonia for 20 years.

He encouraged her and has been her mentor ever since.

The product name came "while I was working wild fire restoration in California," she said. "The name

just popped into my head. I loved the ring of it. It sticks in people's minds."

She asked a biologist friend about ants and found out that the red ants name fit her idea perfectly.

"Female ants do all the work," she said.

It wasn't long after the pants got out that Calhoun began to hear from men.

Some wanted to know why the pants were just for women.

It turns out, real men wear Red Ants Pants, too.

The RAP Web site offers a tongue-in-cheek invitation to men, plus photos of hard-working men in their Red Ants Pants:

"You don't need curves or well-rounded hips,

We've got a straight cut; they'll bring a smile to your lips.

So line up fellas, now here's your chance...

We're finally gonna let you into our pants!"

Reporter Marga Lincoln: 447-4074 or marga.lincoln@helenair.com

Red Ants Pants

206 East Main Street
P.O. Box 690

White Sulphur Springs 59645
(406) 547-3781

Red Ants Pants also sells T-shirts for \$15 and sweatshirts for \$39

On the Web

To see additional information and the YouTube commercial for Red Ants Pants, follow the links in this story online at helenair.com.