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## Business launches hockey gear line for girls

**AP** Associated Press

December 21, 2007

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SOUTH PORTLAND, Maine—Ice hockey has long had the image of being a tough guy's sport.

A couple of South Portland mothers have now launched a business that aims to give the sport a softer edge. Their company, BelaHockey, sells a line of hockey equipment and apparel designed for girls.

The company's Web site went live this month, selling things like polka-dotted hockey sticks and pink-and-purple hockey socks. Customers will also find an instructional DVD produced by Cammi Granato, captain of the U.S. women's hockey teams in the 1998 and 2002 Olympics and a partner in the company.

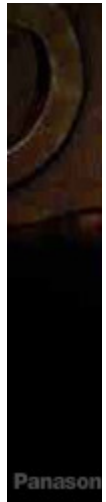
BelaHockey is named for Bela Cloutier, 7-year-old daughter of Anna Cloutier, who started the company with neighbor Justine Carlisle. Bela wanted to play hockey with her two older brothers, but lost some of her enthusiasm when she saw the bland colors of the hockey equipment.

That's when her mother realized there might be niche for gear aimed at girls.

"Everything is literally made to look like it's for boys, so it doesn't give the feeling that (girls) should be playing this sport," Cloutier said.

Cloutier talked it over with Carlisle, who lives across the street, and together they started the company.

The partners say there were 58,000 participants in girls' and women's hockey



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in the United States in the 2005-2006 season, and 74,000 in Canada, more than double the numbers a decade ago. Even with hockey's growing popularity among women and girls, it's a relatively untapped market, Carlisle said.

"There's never been a line produced just for girls, even though this is a growing segment of the sport," she said.

BelaHockey designs the products and has other companies manufacture and fill orders so Cloutier and Carlisle can work on marketing development, design and other aspects of the business.

For now, they run the business from their homes, spending a lot of time running across the street to each other's houses.

The product line includes T-shirts, sticks, socks and accessories. The most popular product so far is the sticks, which feature colorful polka-dots and the company's logo, a girl's face inside a flower-like circle over crossed hockey sticks.

Orders so far have come from Maine, Minnesota, Wisconsin, New Jersey and Canada, Carlisle said. An equipment sales representative from Canada has offered to try to get BelaHockey's products into stores north of the border.





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On the Net: <http://www.belahockey.com>

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Information from: Portland Press Herald, <http://www.pressherald.com> ■

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