

## Ciao Bella: Daughter's dream is mom's inspiration for girls' gear

By Amanda Estes  
Staff Writer

Seven-year-old South Portlander Bela Cloutier believes someday she can play on an Olympic women's hockey team.

That's the kind of confidence two South Portland moms hope to instill in young women with their new line of hockey gear and apparel designed especially for girls. Joining their mission to attract girls to the sport is female hockey star Cammi Granato, whose own dream of playing in the Olympics was fulfilled.

BelaHockey was inspired by Bela Cloutier's determination to keep up with the neighborhood boys who were joining an introductory co-ed hockey league.

Anna Cloutier, a mother of three who co-founded the company with neighbor Justine Carlisle and Granato, said the hockey equipment sold in retail outlets is less than inviting for a young girl.

"Everything was geared toward boys from the color to how they fit," Anna Cloutier said during an interview at her home. "If you make the equipment appeal to young girls maybe more girls would try it."

So Anna Cloutier and Carlisle visited ice rinks and asked girls who were playing in hockey leagues what they would want to wear and use on the ice. Cloutier said the girls wanted equipment they could call their own.

Currently, BelaHockey products are available online and include long-sleeve T-shirts, pink and purple custom hockey socks, personalized polka dot hockey sticks, as well as Katie Kaps, a cotton headband designed to keep girls' hair out of their eyes – inspired by Granato's 10-year-old cousin, Katie Granato.

Bela Cloutier happily modeled the Katie Kap that easily fits under her helmet and showed off the company's colorful hockey stick, which can be personalized with the player's name and number.

When it comes to designing a hockey stick that women will want to use, Anna Cloutier and Carlisle have a hockey legend in their corner, offering input and a life's worth of experience on the ice.

Anna Cloutier said when she and Carlisle



**Hockey stars in training, from left, Katie Granato, Mandi Granato, Allie Granato and Bela Cloutier were in Chicago for the filming of Cammi Granato's new instructional video, "On the Ice With Cammi Granato." (Photo courtesy of Kirsten Schultz Design)**

met with Granato, also a proud mom, in Chicago, "right away, it was just a complete click."

"We completely had the same ideas about what we wanted BelaHockey to be," she said.

Granato, who up until college only faced boys on the ice, said the company is all about empowering girls.

"I know from experience what it's like to feel like you are playing a man's sport and with BelaHockey, we are telling girls and women that hockey is as much their sport as anybody's," Granato wrote in an email.

Granato, who successfully led the U.S. Women's National Team to the first Olympic gold medal in women's hockey in 1998, took to the ice in kindergarten.

"My mom started me out in figure skating lessons and I kept leaving the studio ice during lessons to go watch hockey in the

rink beside it," she wrote. "I told my mom I wanted to play 'that game' instead of figure skating. We made a deal that if I finished lessons that season, next year I could play hockey."

She said winning the gold medal in 1998 was the greatest moment of her sports career.

"We were the underdogs in that tournament having lost to Canada five times in World Championship play," she wrote. "Our team thrived on being the underdogs and gained momentum each game of the Olympics."

Granato said the win "gave women's hockey credibility and now women could walk into the rink with their hockey bags and be confident that they belonged."

To help young girls succeed on the ice, the BelaHockey Web site also offers tips and advice on everything from taping a stick to

breaking in a new pair of skates; from the importance of wearing a mouthguard to enrolling your daughter in hockey for the first time.

"There's so much equipment that even as a parent it can be overwhelming," Carlisle said.

With their product line, however, Anna Cloutier and Carlisle hope to instill confidence in women of all ages. The company's namesake, Bela Cloutier, is helping to prove girls belong on the ice too.

"She went from where she could barely stand on skates to where now she's awesome," said Anna Cloutier, as her daughter broke out into a smile.

For more information about BelaHockey, visit [www.belahockey.com](http://www.belahockey.com).

## Bliss bids for Maine Senate

By Amanda Estes  
Staff Writer

Rep. Lawrence Bliss (D-South Portland) admitted his Dec. 19 announcement may have been a bit early to publicize he plans to run for a seat in the Maine Senate, but he wanted residents to know he is committed to working hard on their behalf.

Deputy Secretary of State Julie Flynn said candidates were able to begin circulating petitions on Jan. 1. In order to participate in the June 10, 2008 primary, party candidates must file their petitions with the secretary of state on or before March 17. Candidates are required to obtain a minimum of 100 signatures.

Bliss, who is the University of Southern Maine's Career Services and Professional Life Development Director, has represented District 122 – part of South Portland – for four terms in the Maine House of Representatives. According to Maine's term limit law, legislators may serve no more than four consecutive terms in any legislative body.

With his intent to run for the seat cur-

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