

# Chicks in *camo*

Unique opportunity discovered  
with women's hunting apparel

**M**ost mothers are the world's biggest fans of their children, but few decide to start a clothing line inspired by them.

Carrol Robbins, decided to create a women's hunting apparel line in 2008, after her son, Cody Robbins host of the hunting show *Live 2 Hunt With Cody Robbins* and his fiancée Kelsey Claypool, also an avid hunter, encouraged her.

"He told me in 2008, "Mom you need to do something for the gals in the industry," said Robbins.

BY ALANNA ADAMKO

At the time, Robbins kept busy during the summer running an ice cream and chocolate shop, homemade pie shop and a fudge factory shop, in Watertown Lakes, Alberta.

During the winter however, when her family ranch in Tessier, Saskatchewan, had harvested its alfalfa hay and the tourism season had ended, Robbins found she was searching for something to do.

"I've always been self employed and in the winter months, when the stores in Waterton Lakes are closed, I needed something to fill those gaps and be productive," she said. With the encouragement and help of her family, Chicks in Camo was born.

Robbins said she started Chicks in Camo, wanting to create an outdoor line for women that had a structured and tailored look, instead of the bulkier men's hunting gear that women hunters wore for lack of alternatives.



Robbin's "Team Chicks" pose in publicity photos for hunting apparel business Chicks in Camo.

She said the challenge was to create an apparel line that was feminine, while remaining practical.

The solution: "We want clothing that is warm and suitable for the climate. It has to be traditional camouflage fabric. We design a pant that is very warm that ladies can just wear a pair of jeans under, we want the fabric to be soft, durable and most importantly, is the quietness of the fabric, when you're hunting and crawling through the bush," she said.

She also wanted to create an apparel line that women could wear hunting and then later on in the day, wear casually. She designed several different styles of hoodies, athletic style tops and form-fitting jackets to serve that purpose.

"We are striving for clothing they can wear in the field and then they can whip off their cover-alls and still wear our clothing out as a casual line," she said.

She designs the clothing in a range of sizes from size extra-small to ladies extra-large to make the line as accessible to as many women as possible.

"We want our company to be accessible to every person from the little girl to the grandma, so we aren't just looking for models, we are looking for everybody," she said.

Robbins has a team of seven women who are active hunters that she has dubbed "Team Chicks." They help provide input and market the apparel line at trade shows, she said. "They are a huge inspiration to Chicks in Camo being successful."

They represent to her, the larger growing segment of women joining the sport of hunting. "The hunting industry is picking up more women in the last five years I would say. Women are coming into the hunting scene and being recognized and noticed, it has probably increased by 30 per cent," she said.

The trade shows are currently her main avenue for selling her clothing line as well as meeting potential clients and finding out what they want to buy. She started selling a girls clothing line for ages newborns to 12 years old, which she says has been hugely successful at trade shows and often sells out.



When people saw the girl's clothing line, many people also requested that she, "do something for little boys as well," she said. This led to the creation of a boy's infant line called "Buck Gear"--now a trade show favourite.

She said that STEP has made many of the trade shows possible through their support. "We have made it to the three biggest trade shows we've gone to in Alberta because of their support. If it hadn't been for their support I don't think we would have been able to do all three shows. I can't say enough good things about them," she said.

They have also helped Robbins with her goal to make her clothing accessible

to a wide range of women, through manufacturing overseas giving her the ability to sell her clothing at an affordable price point.

She said that in her first year of business she had the clothing garments manufactured in Saskatoon, but her clothing was too expensive to reach a wide market.

"The garments were being done in Saskatoon and it just wasn't viable," she said. So she went to STEP to ask for assistance with the manufacturing end of her business. They did a business analysis and came back with the solution to manufacture the line in China, and more importantly, the contacts to make it happen, she said.

"When they suggested manufacturing in China, and when you're new and you haven't done it before, you're like 'are you kidding me, how do you do that?' They opened my eyes to the avenues available to me, the legalities of having to find legitimate manufacturing companies in China and the legal paperwork that would be involved, financing the project, making sure everything is secure, and who I would contact, and what is involved for shipping," she said.

Even with STEP's help, "it doesn't fall into place overnight," she warned. It took one full year for overseas manufacturing to become a reality, she said. True Timber, a camouflage manufacturer and designer in South Carolina, just recently received the first samples of Chicks in Camo apparel back from China.

It was worth the wait however, said Robbins. Not only was True Timber impressed by the price point but the professional quality of the samples as well. They were so impressed they asked Robbins' permission to display the samples in their trade show booth at The Shot Show in Las Vegas, she said. The hunting trade show, which takes place every January, is one of the largest in the world, she added.

"With our clothing going to Vegas for the top people in the industry to view, it is going to open up so many avenues, she said.

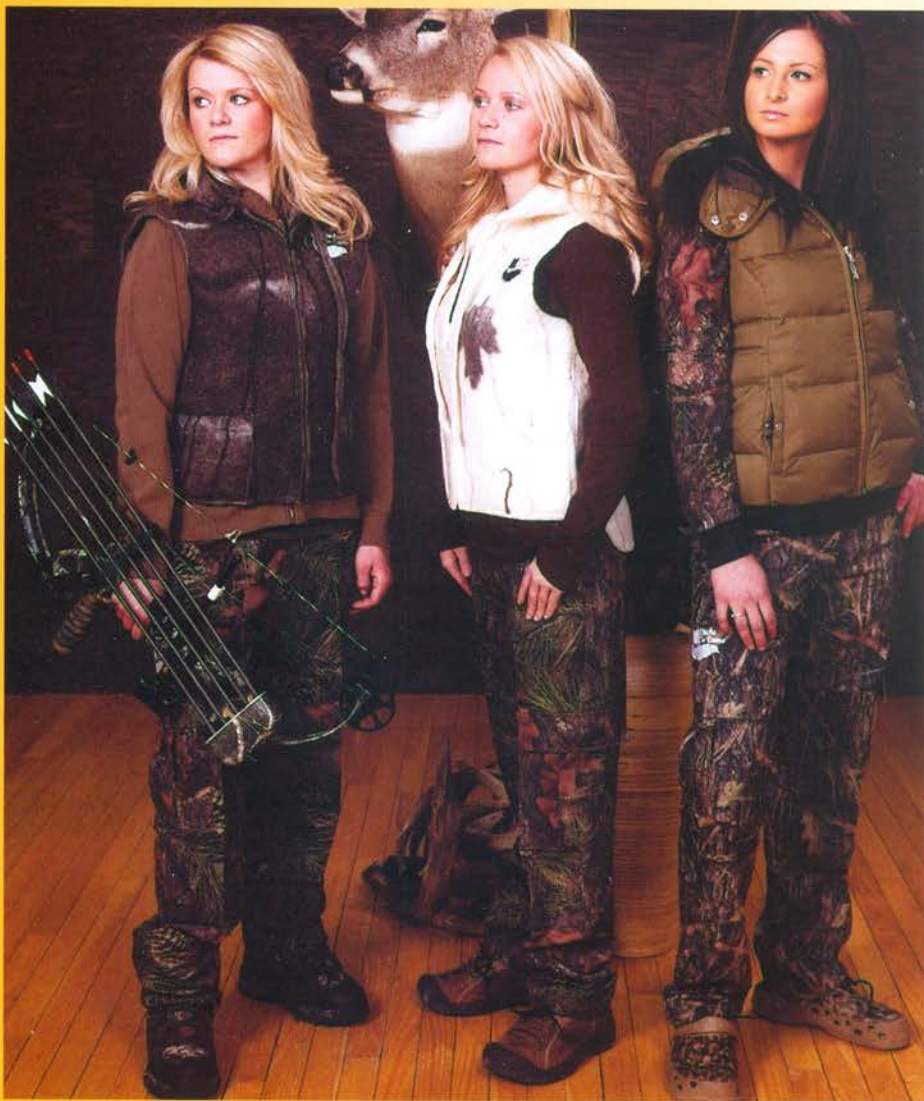
Robbins also plans to attend trade shows in March to continue expanding her market. Chicks in Camo will be featured in Saskatoon and Yorkton and Red Deer and Edmonton in Alberta. For the

first time, she is also planning on breaking into the British Columbia market with a trade show.

Besides increasing sales, Robbins has an ulterior motive to expanding her business – she wants to help as many women as possible reap the benefits of self-employment.

"We are still looking at our product and our company and looking at the best avenues for distribution such as retail outlets and private individuals marketing the product. We want as many women to benefit from Chicks in Camo as possible."

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