

the atmosphere

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After a While Crocodile

The Founders of the Niwot-based Crocs Ride the Wave

BY CHERYL NEDDERMAN

CHANCES ARE YOU'VE SEEN THEM around. That is, if you don't already own a pair yourself. Crocs are those rubbery, functional, and sometimes awkward-looking clogs-turned-urban-hip-ultrafad that seem to be taking over

the footwear fashion world with a force last seen by Birkenstocks in the early '90s. But what might surprise you is that Crocs, originally designed as a boating shoe, are the brainchild of three Coloradans with an unlikely penchant for sailing and an eye for business. Today the three run the company out of Niwot,

shipping the shoes through Denver to an ever-expanding list of retailers across the country and the globe.

George Boedecker, cofounder of Crocs, remembers when the team first introduced the shoes at a boating industry trade show in Florida two years ago. Their hope was to sell a few

shoes at shows and festivals, making just enough to fund their sailing habit. But at that show, explains another cofounder, Duke Hanson, their booth was mobbed. "The show organizers couldn't keep the aisles clear," he says. "We sold almost every shoe." Later that night on their boat—they were sleeping

PHOTO: COURTESY OF CROCS



on the boat to avoid hotel costs – the three decided to start the company. Eventually enlisting the help of Silicon Valley CEO Ronald Snyder and Florida surfing retailer Mike Margolis, former owner of Rainbow sandal company, they expanded their sales by 4,000 percent in just 16 months. Today the company has more than 100 employees and is in negotiations to buy out its Canadian manufacturer.

Scott Seamans, the third cofounder (and self-proclaimed scientist), came up with the Crocs shoe design. Made

from a space-age material called closed-cell resin, the shoes are lightweight, provide great traction, and are resistant to water, bacteria, fungus, or anything else your shoes might soak up. “No matter how smelly your feet are, your Crocs won’t stink,” explains Hanson. Also equipped with a back strap and a foot bed that molds to your feet, these shoes almost guarantee comfort in every color. And lucky for the guys at Crocs, the resin material lends itself to the production of a wealth of other products. In the

works are spa pillows and a line of winter outdoor gear.

But the real phenomenon for Crocs is that they’ve struck a chord with much more than just the boating community. The design seems to appeal to everyone – from ER doctors looking for comfort to urban hipsters looking for flamboyant accessories. Richard Polk, owner of the Pedestrian Shops in Boulder, says that in 30 years in the footwear business, he’s never sold so much of a new product. He reorders three shipments a

week. He himself wears a pair of the green ones. “From 7 to 70 years old, everybody loves these shoes,” says Jae Dellinger, a sales associate at the Pedestrian Shop.

At the Crocs office in Niwot, the fax machine is running on overtime, spitting out orders from all over the country. The energy is excited and anxious. But surprisingly, all the employees seem relaxed. Perhaps it’s the shoes they’ve got on their feet. Or perhaps it’s all the shoes that they’re selling. As Polk notes, “They’ve got to know they’re riding a rocket ship over there.”

“We’re just trying to enjoy the ride,” responds Hanson.

Crocs range from \$29.99 to \$49.99 and are available at various shoe stores. For more information, visit www.crocs.com. ▲

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