

## Neighbors

*Looking to trade, buy, sell or donate used sports equipment?*

*Look no further*

by Nancy Thompson

Like many other moms, Tara Griggs has a garage full of used sports equipment as well as a seemingly constant need for new gear. Unlike many other moms, Ms. Griggs has done something about it.

"I'm a big online researcher and use sites like Craigslist and eBay," she said. "I had all this stuff in my garage, but with eBay, there are costs for mailing, and I couldn't donate it because the Salvation Army wouldn't take it. I wasn't making much by consigning it. One day I had the idea of online swaps."

Swapmesports.com was born.

Ms. Griggs, who described herself as "one of those

"Why didn't I think of that?" people, realized that in this case, she had done exactly that, come up with something new and useful.

She invited her mother, Carol Dornbush of Simsbury, and her stepfather to join in her new venture. Ms. Dornbush had owned and operated the Beautiful Touch day spa in Simsbury for several years and had the kind of business experience her daughter knew would be invaluable.

The three met, and Ms. Griggs presented her business plan. "I want this to be something we can put our arms around," she told them.

Ms. Dornbush and her husband, Gary, talked about it and decided that she would help with the business. Once Mr. Dornbush saw his stepdaughter's PowerPoint presentation, he had a change of heart and wanted to be part of it.

"So he's the coffee boy," Ms. Griggs said with a smile. "He talked to everyone about it. I tell him we might promote him to senior coffee boy."

"My mother has been phenomenal," she added. "A lot of times parents can tell you what their kids do, but they don't really understand what they do. That's not the case here. She deals with attorneys and does the books and so many other things."

"I was about Tara's age when I started a business," Ms. Dornbush said. "I thought her idea was great, especially with the economy as it is. Even without the economy, kids outgrow equipment and parents spend a fortune buying them equipment. This is a great concept, and the people who use it don't have to leave home."

She said everyone involved wears several different hats, adding, "I expect we'll define roles as time goes by. It's exciting for us."

It's an extended family business. Ms. Griggs' ex-

husband, Matt Bragg of West Hartford, is involved, as is her partner, Tim Hassan. Her daughter, Sydney, and step-daughter, Izzy, both 10, hand out business cards and call themselves the vice-presidents of sales for the company.

"My role is to take care of the financial aspects," Mr. Bragg said, "but I'm also helping with ways in how to develop and promote the business, build membership and inventory."

"It's a lot of sweat equity and that's why a business like this works."

The website is easy to use, even for people who aren't regulars at on-line buying and selling. The home page has links for buying, trading, selling and donating sports equipment, both for children and adults, as well as a community calendar listing athletic events throughout the Northeast.

Other links give detailed directions for buying and selling, answers to frequently asked questions and information about the community giving program. There's also a link that lists equipment needed for several sports.

"A big part of the site is about donating equipment," Mr. Bragg said.

"We'll be looking for ways to connect with institutions and charities to provide children who don't have equipment to be able to get some. If there's a chance that we can benefit the communities, that would be great."

"It's also exciting to have a place for people to recycle and re-use equipment and give it a longer

life than it might have otherwise.

There's no charge to use the site; revenue will come from advertisements.

The site has been up and running since late May and already has attracted users from as far as California and Florida.

Tracy Agreda of West Hartford met Ms. Griggs during their daughters' skating lesson at the Veterans Memorial Skating Rink in West Hartford.

"One afternoon, she handed me a stack of business cards and introduced not only herself, but the new company she was forming," Ms. Agreda said. "I asked her some questions in regards to fees, listings, etc and she happily explained everything. Once her website was live, my kids and I hauled out ice skates, bikes, baseballs, Frisbees and any other sports equipment we have been dying to get rid of, but hated to just put it by the curb for garbage disposal. So far we have listed four items and our first item, a girl's bicycle, sold for \$15. The money went to my daughter Libby toward a new bike she has been saving for. That was a true treat. Since we have three ice skaters in the family, we are always searching the site for skating outfits, skates, guards. Her site is so user-friendly that my kids can do their own search with little to no assistance."

Ms. Griggs grew up in Simsbury, graduated from Simsbury High School, and lived in town until she was 28. She said



*Tara Griggs got tired of looking at all the old sports equipment in her garage. The result was [swapmesports.com](http://swapmesports.com).*

she was always interested in writing, advertising and public relations. She landed a job as a research associate for Michael Levine, a marketing expert known for the "Tiffany theory." The theory states that anything in a Tiffany box has a higher value than anything not in a Tiffany box.

Ms. Griggs printed out her resume, put it in a

Tiffany box and sent it to him by overnight mail.

"He called the next day and hired me," she said. Over the next few years, she worked with his publisher, booking interviews, writing forwards and introductions and researching.

It was a great job, but she decided she needed something full-time with health insurance, so she put