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## HIP TO BE SQUARE: Salinas women create hip-T

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The crack attack. It's not everybody's everyday problem, but if you are a woman who likes to wear low-rise jeans, quite possibly you've experienced it.

That's when stooping, bending or just sitting creates a gap between the bottom of your shirt and the top of your jeans, revealing underwear and excess flesh — not the most attractive sight.

And that's when necessity became the mother of invention.

Two resourceful Salinas women came to the rescue of fashionistas everywhere with their invention, the hip-T, a fabric wrap that keeps unmentionables covered and adds a spicy twist to the layered T-shirt craze.

Christine Meeks and Kelley DeSerpa, two stay-at-home moms who have been friends for 11 years, came up with the idea almost two years ago as something they could sell to make a little extra money.

Now, they're selling anywhere from hundreds to thousands per week.

"We were looking for a practical solution to an everyday problem," said Meeks, 40, who, like DeSerpa, is the mother of three daughters.

Both saw the extra exposure that happens to women in low-rise jeans. And yes, both had been guilty of it themselves.

Meeks began experimenting with old T-shirts, and came up with a fabric ring that fits from waist to hip. Worn so that it peeks out from under a shirt, the hip-T creates a fashionable layered look in addition to covering one's assets.

"Everyone always says, when they hear about it, 'Why didn't I think of that?'" said Meeks.

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Adds DeSerpa, 42, "It's easy to wear and comfortable, and it changes up a plain T-shirt. It's a no-brainer."

And slowly but surely, the hip-T is making inroads in the fashion world.

In May, DeSerpa and Meeks were featured on "The Big Idea with Donny Deutsch" on CNBC, and their product will also be highlighted in several magazines later this year, including First for Women and Millionaire Blueprints.

Appearing on the Donny Deutsch show was a big step forward.

"They flew us out to New York," said DeSerpa. "It was a hoot. But he told us, 'You've really got something there. Just keep plugging away.'"

The hip-T will get additional exposure in August, when Meeks and DeSerpa show it off in Las Vegas at the Magic fashion trade show, a huge

event for fashion buyers and trendsetters.

The hip-T, made of cotton with a touch of stretchy Lycra, is available in a variety of colors and sizes. The sizes range from extra small to 3XL, and they retail for \$15.95.

Most popular colors? The basics, black and white.

It's being sold in about 30 clothing boutiques around the country and is available online through a variety of fashion sites, and via its own Web site, [www.myhip-T.com](http://www.myhip-T.com).



Christine Meeks and Kelley DeSerpa, owners of g3 Originals in Salinas, ... (VERN FISHER/The Herald)

Locally, you'll find hip-Ts at Sahara Sun in Salinas and Monterey; Pamplemousse in Carmel; and Vivi Couture in Monterey.

The success of the hip-T can be attributed to a blend of local talent and online resources. Meeks, who previously worked in event planning, and DeSerpa, a former kindergarten teacher, say they didn't know anything about running their own business, but many people have helped them along the way.

Carmel artist Nicole Dore designed the sassy logo. The Web site was created by Monterey company Byte Tech.

Through the Internet, Meeks and DeSerpa found their fabrics and their manufacturer, and even filed their trademark.

"We've been really lucky," said Meeks. "We met the right people."

But in the beginning they started small.

A lot of time was spent developing the product. Meeks tried different fabrics and contours before coming up with the present wrap.

They first offered them at a local holiday gift party in 2006, despite their fears that no one would like them.

"I thought, they're going to think we're kind of wacky," said DeSerpa. "But we sold them all."

Then, as the word spread, the phone calls started coming from all over. Women wanted the hip-T.

Now they get calls and e-mails from all over the world, with praise for their product.

"We get them from dads (of teenage daughters) saying, 'Oh, thank God for this,'" said DeSerpa.

These days, Meeks and DeSerpa are trying to keep up with demand — while the product is manufactured by a San Francisco factory, they still do all their own packaging and shipping — and at the same time, planning to expand. They're pitching the hip-T to a distributor in Japan.

They're still figuring a lot of it out, though. Right now they're deciding if there is a way to "discreetly brand" their invention, perhaps with a small logo.

Trying to run their business and homes has been a challenge.

"It's a mixed thing," said Meeks. "Our husbands are very supportive and think it's a great idea. But it's a little hairy sometimes."

"You have to find a balance," agreed DeSerpa. "But any working mom goes through that."