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A RIVETING BUSINESS VENTURE

Military spouses form a company to honor history's heroes with handmade bags

By DONNA BOYLE SCHWARTZ

A 'RIVETING' BUSINESS VENTURE

Military spouses **LISA BRADLEY** and **CAMERON CRUSE** honor history's heroes with handmade bags



The legendary can-do spirit that earned World War II Americans the nickname "the greatest generation" is alive and well among today's military spouses, as evidenced by a fast-growing entrepreneurial venture, R. Riveter, which produces unique handbags and accessories handcrafted in the U.S.A.

Billing itself as "a company created by military spouses for military spouses," R. Riveter (www.riveter.com) was founded by military spouses Lisa Bradley and Cameron Cruse, who met in Dahlonoga, Georgia, when their husbands were Ranger instructors at Camp Merrill.

"Our one-of-a-kind handbag company was born out of a mix of frustration, passion and creativity, and designed to help chip away at the heart of military spouse employment woes," Bradley explains. "Military families are relocated every 2.9 years, making it difficult for the spouse to pursue a single career or gain work experience. Military spouses face on average higher unemployment or underemployment rates than the rest of society. In turn, this produces stress and tension in the home life that affects not just their family, but their military service member's readiness on the battlefield."

Inspired by the powerful World War II emblem "Rosie the Riveter," all of R. Riveter's handbags are handmade in America by military spouses, known as "Riveters," all over the country. The company provided income opportunities to 103 military families in 2017 and one out of every three dollars spent at R. Riveter goes directly back into the hands of military families.

R. Riveter has pioneered a new business model, which Bradley calls a "deconstructed assembly line," in which each Riveter is responsible for constructing one particular element of a product; the components are sent to a warehouse in North Carolina for assembly. "It's a mobile, flexible community made up by women and men dedicated to helping those serving in the military," she says, adding, "Nobody thought our remote manufacturing model would work—bringing the factory into the kitchen or living room seemed unimaginable."


By virtually all accounts, the innovative business is a success: The company started when co-founders Bradley and Cruse both put \$2,100 on credit cards in 2011, but rapidly expanded with funding from American investor Mark Cuban after the pair appeared on *Shark Tank*. Today, R. Riveter is among the 1.8 percent of women-owned businesses that exceed the \$1 million revenue mark; the company grew 1,475 percent from 2014 to 2016, and this growth landed it on Inc.'s 2017 list of fastest-growing private companies in America. Currently, most products are sold online, although the company has opened a stand-alone retail store in Southern Pines, N.C.

Each R. Riveter handbag is named after a female hero of American military history. For example, the Corbin backpack was named after Margaret



Lisa Bradley and Cameron Cruse

Cochran Corbin, a nurse who decided to join her husband John fighting in the American Revolution. When her husband fell in battle, Corbin manned his cannon, continuing to fire at British troops until she, too, could no longer continue due to being hit by enemy fire in the jaw, chest and arm. Corbin became the first woman to receive a military pension, and has a monument dedicated to her at West Point Cemetery.

"We couldn't think of a better namesake for the first backpack in our line than Margaret Corbin," Bradley states. "As with all our products, we want the women who carry our bags to feel like they're not only getting a stylish and high-quality accessory, but that they feel inspired and empowered by the stories of the women for whom they are named. Our goal is for the legacy Margaret Corbin left behind to inspire bravery, confidence and adventure in each and every person who carries the Corbin handbag." 

How To

By DONNA BOYLE SCHWARTZ



FUN FOR EVERYONE

HOW TO THROW A PARTY SO THAT GUESTS WITH DISABILITIES FEEL ACCEPTED AND INCLUDED

There's a very good chance that a person with a disability will be attending your next party. Approximately one in five Americans has a disability, making people with disabilities the largest minority group in the United States, according to RespectAbility, a leading nonprofit educational and advocacy organization. Military families, especially the families of wounded veterans, know firsthand how difficult it can be to return to regular activities following a disabling injury or illness.

Since the essence of hospitality is making all guests feel accepted, relaxed and comfortable, just a little bit of effort can ensure that disabled people share equally in the joyful party mood. "It's easy to hold a party where all guests—with and without disabilities—feel welcomed, respected and have fun," says Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi, president of RespectAbility. "All it takes is some planning."


Communication is key for both party planners and guests. "If you know someone has a disability, ask the person what they need to be fully included," Mizrahi says. "All too often people with disabilities are not invited to events, or don't go because they feel embarrassed to 'put someone out' by asking for a simple thing that will help them attend. By telling them that their presence is valued, and asking what they need, you will build a new level of trust and affection."

As military families know, not all disabilities are visible and obvious, so Mizrahi suggests including a line in the invitation that reads: "We want everyone to have fun, so please let us know if you have dietary restrictions or require other special accommodations to attend! We will do our best to meet special needs." Include different food options—such as gluten-free treats—for people with allergies, celiac disease or lactose intolerance. "If it's a party for children, parents can tell you, right off the bat, what their child's needs might be to attend the party," she says. "They will be happy you asked!"

Party location can be an important component to accommodating disabled children and adults. Most public spaces are now fully accessible, but double check before selecting a venue. For home parties, think about

the location of food, beverages and games, and place items on tables that are within easy reach of people in wheelchairs.

Accommodating guests with hearing loss, vision impairment or learning disabilities can be as simple as using pictures and verbal instructions to explain activities. It also can help to have a "buddy system," where differently abled guests are paired to ensure that everyone has fun. For children's parties, consider involving parents. "Asking a parent or two to volunteer at the party, particularly if it's a big group, can lighten the load," Mizrahi says. "Parents may feel more comfortable, especially if their child has social anxiety issues, if they are invited to stay or help as an option."

Above all, Mizrahi says, have a good time. "If you are considering these tips, you're already doing more than most!" she says. "Stay positive, smile, and throw that party!" 

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- **Top 10 Accessible Party Locations**
- Large theme parks
- Bowling alleys
- Zoos
- Aquariums
- Botanical gardens
- Science museums
- Farms/Petting zoos
- Planetariums
- Gymnasiums/Sports venues
- Movie theaters
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