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**Brookings Rotarian chosen to pitch her “Doorhickey®” invention on TV show**

**BROOKINGS –** A creative solution to a household problem combined with perseverance and refusal to take “no” for an answer resulted in an invitation for a Brookings Rotary Club’s Ginger Thomson to showcase her invention on a soon to be released Amazon-streamed television game show.

The Doorhickey®, invented by Brookings residents Ginger Thomson and husband, Jay Vanduch, will be featured on an upcoming episode of Amazon’s new game show, “BUY IT NOW,” which will be streamed through Amazon Prime. The episode on which they appear has already been recorded, but the airing date has not yet been released.

“‘BUY IT NOW’ is a business competition game show. Think ‘Shark Tank’ meets ‘QVC,’” said Thomson, who noted that the program is hosted by celebrity entertainer J.B. Smoove. “He’s really funny,” she added, “and he’s a great host. It was fun to be on the show and it will be fun for those who watch. He’s very engaging.”

Thomson, who has been a Rotarian since 1989, was the first female president of the Brookings Rotary Club and has participated as a Group Study Exchange team member to India, as a GSE team leader to France, and as a Friendship Exchange member to Sweden.

The Doorhickey® may be familiar to some, but for others will be seen as a handy gadget that offers a simple solution to an inconvenience experienced by anyone who has a sliding glass door: how to open the door with their hands full. Conceived by Thomson and Vanduch, The Doorhickey® is made of injection molded plastic and rubber. “Simply push the suction cup onto the glass of the sliding door, then turn the handle clockwise to create what we call a ‘Herculean’ suction,” said Vanduch. This “extra handle” allows the user to open the door with only an elbow, arm, hip, or foot. Thomson added, “We sell them in sets of two, one for the inside and one for the outside of the door.”

The need for an adaptive product occurred to Thomson in 1980 while hosting outside gatherings on the patio of her townhouse but she didn’t pursue it. The seed was planted, however, and the idea resurfaced in 1990 when Thomson’s mother moved into a home with a sliding glass door. Thomson and Vanduch discussed the idea, but didn’t devote time or resources to exploring a solution. It was in 1996, when they built their own home, which included two sets of sliding glass doors, they once again noted the need for a product that would address the problem.

The pivotal moment occurred a year later in an unlikely way. When the couple was bathing their infant son, they noticed a bath toy held in place by multiple suction cups. That sparked a light bulb moment. “We looked at each other and said, ‘Could this be adapted for a hands-free door opener?’ and we started to tinker with a design.” The idea moved from the back to the front burner.

By 2005, the couple hired the S.D. Enterprise Institute to search for related products and patents. They found that the only existing solutions were expensive and motorized. “Jay’s ingenuity led him to a simplified version of a vacuum suction device,” said Thomson, “that uses a threaded bolt inside a rubber suction cup that, when turned clockwise, creates a strong grip on glass surfaces.” But life’s demands once again relegated the idea to the “maybe someday” file.

In the mid-2000s, the couple found renewed determination and hired the SDSU Rapid Prototyping Institute to create a prototype. Their efforts paid off: The Doorhickey® began winning first-place awards at inventor shows. They filed for a patent, which Thomson said was “a journey fraught with rejections and revisions, costing thousands of dollars.”

In 2013, The Doorhickey® was selected to pitch to “As Seen on TV” companies and was the only invention to receive multiple licensing and royalty offers. But when asked for their patent status, Thomson and Vanduch discovered their attorney had let it lapse, causing the deal to fall through. Working with a new attorney, the patent was revived in 2014 when they secured a manufacturer and launched a website.

The Doorhickey® won the QVC Sprouts competition, leading to a sell-out on QVC.com. QVC, which stands for “Quality-Value-Convenience,” is a television network and shopping channel. The company broadcasts to more than 350 million households in seven countries.

A frequent comment Thomson and Vanduch receive is “You should be on Shark Tank!” In fact, they applied to “Shark Tank” twice, reaching the final rounds but never given the opportunity to pitch to the “sharks.”

After nearly two decades of actively trying to market their invention, their perseverance was rewarded at The Inspired Home Show in Chicago in 2023. The Doorhickey® was named a finalist for the International Housewares Association’s Global Innovation Awards for product design in the category of Home Décor and Gifts. A “Shark Tank” producer noticed the product, prompting yet another application to appear on that network show, although they didn’t make the final cut. The Doorhickey® also caught QVC’s attention again and a purchase order followed. In June, Thomson travelled to QVC’s Pennsylvania headquarters and demonstrated The Doorhickey® on its live segments “Simple Home Solutions” and “At Home with Rosina.”

In addition, they were among just 60 inventors nationwide that were selected to compete on the new Amazon series called "BUY IT NOW," that premiered last month on Amazon Prime Video. They had the opportunity to pitch their products to celebrity judges as well as to everyday shoppers--all for a chance to win a cash investment in their business and to have their product featured in the "BUY IT NOW" store on Amazon. Last March they were flown to Los Angeles by the production company to record the episode that will air in the coming months.

The couple has privately financed the entire Doorhickey® process and hopes this next television experience will help give the product the exposure it needs to be even more successful. “It’s one thing to have a concept and create the solution,” said Thomson. “It’s another to successfully market the product with a limited budget.” Thomson and Vanduch recently started making TikTok videos to create awareness of The Doorhickey®. “The results have been astonishing, especially with one of the videos garnering more than 112,000 views. Those views have also translated into sales.” Vanduch remarked.

The Doorhickey® is popular in the grilling/outdoor market but has lately been picking up steam in the adaptive/accessible arena. According to Stefanie Remson, one of their customers with limited hand mobility, “I actually liked the product so much that I bought two more for my sliding glass shower doors. It’s been a total game changer. I have rheumatoid arthritis, and it affects my hands and wrist very badly, and sometimes opening and closing those doors is the hardest thing of my day."

“It’s unique, it’s affordable, and it solves a problem anyone with a sliding glass door has experienced,” said Thomson. “And it’s manufactured right here in South Dakota!” Thomson sold The Doorhickey® at last summer’s Brookings Arts Festival, and when one woman walked past the booth, Thomson asked her if she knew about The Doorhickey®. “Know about it? I made it!” said the festivalgoer from Aberdeen, who works at Cardinal Industries, the manufacturer of The Doorhickey®.

Perhaps the “invention gene” runs in Thomson’s family. Her grandfather was a prolific patent holder, and her father, Verl, was a pioneering radio broadcasting entrepreneur who invented radio automation, radiotorials, and even the original version of “The Dating Game.”

She is no stranger to the camera, either; Miss South Dakota USA 1977, she earned her master’s degree in journalism from SDSU and has worked as an on-air television personality and an adjunct instructor in communications, as well as in front of and behind the camera with the company she and Vanduch own, TV Productions, Inc. Vanduch, who also has a master’s degree in journalism, recently retired from his position as operations manager at the Oscar Larson Performing Arts Center.

“It’s been a long road with The Doorhickey®, but we really think our persistence is going to pay off this time,” said Thomson. “Our belief in this product, a commitment to hard work, and the tenacity to keep trying: that’s the story of The Doorhickey®.”

The Doorhickey® sells for $29.99 for a set of two (one for the inside and one for the outside) and can be purchased at Amazon directly or through [www.doorhickey.com](http://www.doorhickey.com).

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CUTLINES:

1. Ginger Thomson and Jay Vanduch presented the program at a Brookings Rotary Club meeting, announcing that their invention, The Doorhickey®, will be featured on a new TV show streamed by Amazon Prime, “Buy It Now.” It is available through Amazon.com or doorhickey.com.
2. Thomson demonstrates The Doorhickey® on “Simple Home Solutions” with QVC host Rachel Boesing. The Doorhickey® was recently featured on QVC, the largest player in video commerce.
3. Thomson demonstrates The Doorhickey® on QVC’s “At Home with Rosina” with host Rosina Grosso.
4. Ginger Thomson and Jay Vanduch on stage at Amazon Studios, getting ready to pitch The Doorhickey® to potential customers and a celebrity panel comprised of skating legend Tony Hawk, Ring doorbell inventor Jamie Siminoff, and Amazon executive Jenny Freshwater.
5. CU The Doorhickey®