

Banking, philanthropy and duct tape:

How one Traverse City woman keeps it all together

BY JOAN O'NEILL

Wendy Steele has hardly ever been one to sit still for very long. As a banker-turned-inventor, that's a good thing, for when an idea pops into her head, it's not long before she is off and running with it – and making it a success.

Wendy's go-get-'em spirit is a gift from her elders. The second oldest of three daughters, Steele and her sisters were empowered with the belief that they could do anything to which they put their minds.

"My Dad always inspired us to do what we wanted. He told us that 'Girls could do anything,'" says Steele. "I grew up in a family that gave back, worked hard, valued relationships and valued each other."

Giving back is what earned Steele an interview by Katie Couric and a prominent feature story in *People* magazine in 2003. The topic for these interviews was



Formerly a banker, Wendy Steele is now fully engaged in distributing the Tape Wrangler, which she and her husband created and which can be found nationally at True Value, Ace and Orgill Hardware cooperatives, and Amazon.com.

an innovative, philanthropic organization for women called Impact 100, which Steele founded in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 2001.

Impact 100 basically works like this: Each chapter has a minimum of 100 members, each of whom donates \$1,000 a year. Collectively, the chapter then donates 100% of the funds collected to a local charity that is democratically chosen by

DUCT TAPE CONT'D FROM COVER

members of the chapter – one vote per person.

That first year, Steele's Impact 100 gave \$100,000 to a dental clinic in Cincinnati that serves the dental needs of the homeless.

Now Steele is enjoying a new national spotlight.

Wendy and her husband, Rick, are the creators of Tape Wrangler, a family of innovative tape dispensers for heavy duty and shipping tapes. Manufactured in Traverse City, Tape Wrangler came to life after the Steeles spent countless hours wrestling with duct tape while working on the prototype of yet another invention.

After searching high and low for a duct tape dispenser to help ease their adhesion woes, the Steeles came to the conclusion that no such thing existed. This kept Wendy up at night as her brain taunted her with the need – and possibilities – for such an invention. Finally, Wendy convinced herself that they needed to 'go for it,' and the two began pursuing engineering such a tape dispenser.

Long story short, that is how Tape Wrangler came to be. In the fall of 2006, the first Tape Wrangler duct tape dispenser, the Tape Wrangler 700, went to the market and saw much success. Today, the Tape Wrangler line of products includes the Tape Wrangler 700 (a favorite of long-time users), the Tape Wrangler 700S and the shipping tape model, the Tape Wrangler ProSeal 200D, which alone has 19 different patent applications and 30 claims for individ-

ual features. The Tape Wrangler line can be found nationally at True Value, Ace and Orgill Hardware cooperatives, and is sold on Amazon.com. Home Depot also carries a private label version. What's more, Tape Wrangler has been featured on HGTV's "Cool New Launches" and next quarter will be featured on the DIY Network's Cool Tool series.

Steele credits the success of Tape Wrangler to timing – creating the right thing at the right time. Much of its success can also be attributed to her business background, which includes a 23-year career in banking. Prior to committing 100 percent of her time to Tape Wrangler last summer, Steele was a Senior Vice President at Huntington Bank in Traverse City, serving as the Regional Director of Private Finance for a territory that spanned from Manistee all the way north to Sault Saint Marie.

"My grandfather always said to me that, 'Banking is the best background for business.'"

Even with their success, neither Rick nor Wendy are resting on their heels. Already in the pipeline are additional Tape Wrangler models that hone in on the needs of specific professions, as well as private label negotiations with other major national chains. The couple also has another invention or two up their sleeves, and are anticipating a good 2009.

To learn more about Tape Wrangler, go to www.tapewrangler.com.
