

TempoWoman

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Tribune photo by José Moré

Mary Anne Jackson with her daughter, Kathleen: Filling the needs of busy moms and hungry children.

Motherhood fuels a business

Mary Anne Jackson's corporate career experience gave her the know-how to launch a business of her own. But motherhood provided the inspiration.

"Like all working moms, I was worried about what my children were eating when I wasn't there," said Jackson, a former food product strategist and planner and the inventor of My Own Meals Inc., a collection of entrees aimed at pleasing the palates of children and meeting their nutritional needs.

As a working mother, Jackson, 34, of Deerfield, had spent laborious Sunday nights preparing fare to be doled out during the week to her daughter, Kathleen, now 3, by a babysitter.

When she lost her job in a corporate reshuffling, she decided to turn a hunch into a business. Last year she enlisted the help of her diaper service to distribute a questionnaire to mothers asking what they would like to see in convenience foods for children.

She and her staff received an "overwhelming response" from women who said they wanted simple, healthy meals that were portable, easily stored and quickly prepared.

With that information and the collected food preferences of her targeted market, children ages 2 to 8, Jackson consulted industry colleagues and nutrition experts and came up with My Own Meals.

Parents now can select from five offerings: chicken with vegetables, meatballs and shells, turkey meatballs, pasta and chicken and macaroni, minus any artificial ingredients.

All come in child-size plastic pouches that do not need refrigeration. They can be heated quickly on a stovetop, in a microwave or conventional oven or simply by running the pouch under warm tap water.

"You can throw them in your purse and take them anywhere: day care, Grandma's house, an airplane," said Jackson, who also has an 8-month-old son, Joseph.

She and several employees closely guard the quality of the meals.

Since launching the entrees at the end of April, Jackson has sold about 1,000 by mail order from her Deerfield office. Some North Shore grocery stores also carry the products. This month My Own Meals, from \$2.39 to \$2.99, will debut in Chicago area Jewel and Dominick's food stores.

Further information is available by writing My Own Meals Inc., 400 Lake Cook Rd., Suite 107, Deerfield, Ill. 60015.

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