

60 SECONDS

CASEY BACA

MOTHER OF BELLA, 7, AVA, 4, AND TWINS LOLA AND GABRIELLA, 3 • GREW UP IN HINSDALE • ATTENDED DE PAUL UNIVERSITY • ENJOYS WORKING OUT • ATTENDS UNIQUELY THURSDAYS WITH HER FAMILY

Hinsdale resident Casey Baca is a busy lady. When she's not busy attending to her four daughters, she's running around town, hitting the gym or managing her skyrocketing business — which started because of her hectic schedule in the first place. "When I was pregnant with Ava, I was essentially looking for something to keep my daughter Bella busy," she said. "I was going out of my mind with parent boredom and couldn't stand sitting around. We would always be on the go. We'd be at the gym or going to dinner." Baca came up with the idea to assemble a small backpack with loads of activities for her daughter in order to keep her busy in the car or wherever they were going. But she had a hard time finding backpacks she liked for little kids. "I decided to make my own because I couldn't find any cute ones," she said. Seeing a need in her own life as a busy mom, Baca began doing research online and found people to help her get her company, Four Peas, off the ground. The original idea was to create fashionable, cute backpacks for little ones packed with activities like crayons and paper. But in the early stages of the company she realized the assembly was driving the costs up too high and chose to stick with just providing cute, quality bags instead. Four years later, with merchandise selling locally in stores such as Bugs and Kisses and Munchkinland, as well as throughout the U.S. and internationally, Baca said her husband, Gary, is very proud of what she's accomplished. "He took a huge chance on letting me gamble with our money," she said. "It takes a lot upfront to get a business like this off the ground." Baca develops all her own design ideas, and what started with a handful of backpacks has grown to a line of more than 55 different products including lunch bags, messenger bags, duffel bags and more. Balancing a thriving new business and motherhood has been a challenge. "I have constant guilt," she said. "I'm around a lot, but I do travel for trade shows. The Blackberry is the best and worst thing ever because I feel like it's always glued to my hand." In an attempt to separate business and family time, she recently moved her office outside of her home. "That helped a lot because I stopped hearing the business line ring," she said. "At the end of the day I have to just turn it off and be done — otherwise my kids are tugging at my leg." Now that she has merchandise in stores throughout the nation and is hitting up trade shows left and right, Baca said the future of her company looks bright, but she wants growth to happen organically. "We now have a warehouse and distribution center in Utah and we're on Bath and Body Works Web site. We've grown quickly, but I don't feel rushed, like we need to be in every department store immediately," she said. "Years from now I would love to have a multi-million dollar business designing bags for people all over the world." With her products soon to be featured in Bon Appetit Magazine and other publications, Baca's clearly on her way and said she still gets giddy seeing children wearing her bags. "I saw a little kid walking down the street in Atlanta with one on," she said. "It's overwhelmingly exciting."

— by Christine Cuthbert



Hinsdale mom Casey Baca found herself always on the go with small children. That's when she began designing backpacks with activities to keep her kids busy. Now the founder of an internationally known company, she relies on the help of friends Sara Buffett and Christa Roehl to keep Four Peas up and running. (Jim Slonoff photo)

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