

Boom times for baby business

Earth Mama Angel Baby offers natural products for pregnancy, delivery and beyond

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CLACKAMAS Mother's Day comes 365 days a year at Earth Mama Angel Baby.

There's a new baby born every minute, chief executive Melinda Olson likes to say, and her 11-person crew stands ready all year long to pamper moms before and after delivery.

Calls and e-mails to the small, privately owned Clackamas company had an increasingly urgent tone this week as Mother's Day approached. The woman known as "mama in charge" says demand for her natural and organic products has grown rapidly since she and business partner Lori Dorman started the company in 2001.

Earth Mama Angel Baby manufactures what Olson says is the only complete line of natural and organic products that support a woman from pregnancy through labor, postpartum recovery, breastfeeding, child care -- even after the death of a baby. Products range from herbal teas aimed at easing morning sickness to balms designed to soothe hemorrhoids.

The company has carved out a reputation for quality products and services in the \$5 billion natural personal-care products industry, which last year grew by about 22 percent, according to Natural Marketing Institute.

Moms from South Korea to Ireland buy the products, Olson says. In the United States, magazines such as Natural Health, Child, Yogi Times and Southern Baby, and the online site ePregnancy.com have featured the company's products.

After Child magazine reported in February 2005 that actress Gwyneth Paltrow used Earth Mama Angel Baby's stretch oil before the birth of daughter Apple, the company was deluged with orders. (Paltrow again bought the stretch oil before the birth last month of her second child, Moses Martin, Olson says.)

Sales have doubled every year, Olson says, adding that's pretty good for a business that was run from her Stafford-area garage until July.

Olson, 54, was a nurse specializing in emergency care when she began growing herbs and studying herbal medicine and aromatherapy in the early 1990s. She launched a business called Natural Stuff Botanicals and by 1998 realized there was a niche in products for pregnant women and new mothers.

In 2000, she met Dorman, a Los Angeles-based birthing coach and part-time photographer. They opened Earth Mama Angel Baby the following year and made a grand total of \$17,400 in net sales. This year, the company is on track to top \$1 million in net sales, said Don Olson, Olson's husband and business development manager.

In addition to running the business, Olson still blends most of the teas and herb-infused oils. Dorman's photography defines the company's image, including on the Web site that is not only a catalog but also a resource, support group and photo album for expectant and new mothers.

Judi Martin, owner of Mother Nature's Earth Friendly Baby Products in Southeast Portland, says the Earth Mama Angel Baby line does a "fantastic" business in her 3-year-old store. She praises the company's customer service and the product line's packaging, price and quality.

"The products are wonderful," Martin says. "They really do what they claim to do."

Olson's experience with the pregnancy and birth of her eldest child, Josh, now 32 and an independent software developer for Microsoft, drove her passion for tending to the needs of pregnant women and new mothers.

She was given a medicine for morning sickness that now is feared to cause birth defects. After she delivered Josh, as was the routine three decades ago, nurses took him away, and she didn't see him again until the next day.

Olson did things differently when she was expecting Kaitlin, now 30 and an actress who appeared in "Curb Your Enthusiasm" and "The Drew Carey Show."

"She was born in my living room, and I was attended by a naturopath," she says. "It was the most intimate of experiences."

Olson's passion for herbal products also fuels her entrepreneurial mission.

"The process of pregnancy and childbirth is natural, and we should treat symptoms naturally," she says. "Herbs have been used for thousands and thousands of years by women, and that deserves to be honored. It's wise of us to take advantage of it."

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