



A good sport

A local “web-preneur”
finds success serving
a local market...
and unexpectedly steps
onto the national stage

by Corina A. Lopes
Photo by Sydney Bragg

Courtesy of SwapMeSports.com

■ It wasn't that long ago that mention of the word "shopping cart" would bring to mind the image of a metal push-cart on four squeaky wheels, filled to overflowing with clothes, home goods or groceries.

The word has taken on a second, more symbolic definition, thanks to the inception of sites like eBay, craigslist and Amazon. Seemingly overnight, the consumer landscape has revolutionized, with a world of goods to be bought, sold or traded, literally at our fingertips.

But as the popularity of these sites has grown, they've become more time-consuming, costly and complicated to navigate, leaving even savvy shoppers and bargain hunters frustrated.

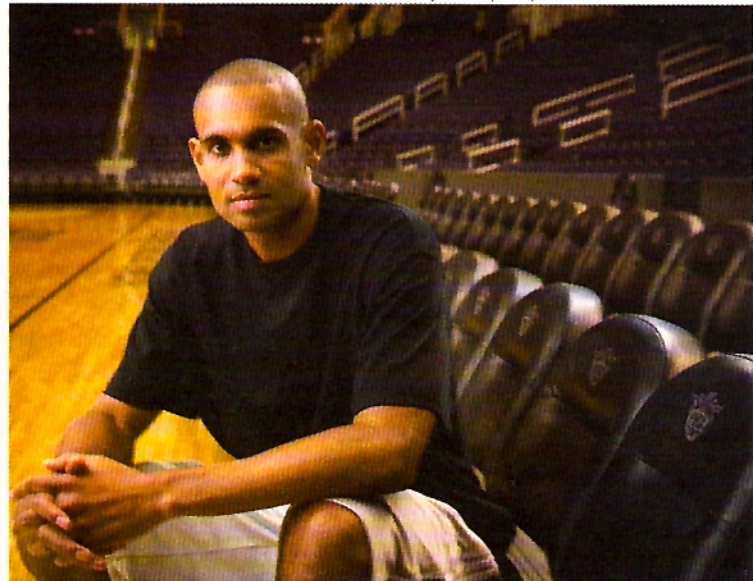
Tara Griggs is out to remedy that – at least when it comes to sporting goods.

In May, she launched **SwapMeSports.com**, described as **an online community that allows you and your neighbors, family and friends to buy, sell, donate or find sports equipment without listing, selling and shipping fees.** By the second month, the site had more than 30,000 page views – evidence that the site had hit a home run with the sports community.

The idea got its start in December 2009, when Griggs began talking with family and friends about the need for "a central location where people can barter sports goods and equipment – especially parents and coaches. I knew we could do it, and soon after, I began interviewing web vendors and designers until I found one with the flavor and feel I was looking for," said Griggs, who works full time in the corporate advertising department at Aetna.

The next thing she knew, she was putting her professional know-how to work – along with that of her family and neighbors – to get this small business up and running. Even her daughter and stepdaughter, both 10, play a role in its success. "They're allowed to give cards out to friends at games and at school. They like to joke they are VP of sales."

Within a few months, the fledgling company's Facebook page had attracted more than 800 fans, and the website gets hundreds of hits daily. Yet as any good athlete knows, winning takes a lot of heart. Heart is at the center of Griggs' business. She said everyone who works or partners with the company has children, "and our heart is kids. Although people can buy or sell their old equipment on our site, **the focus is on the donation section.** How great would it be to get equipment to children or coaches playing in underfunded commu-



Phoenix Suns basketball player Grant Hill has teamed with Clorox and SwapMeSports.com to eliminate community-associated MRSA.

nities, so that they can have a fair shot at competing, too?"

It wasn't long before SwapMeSports.com drew the attention of the book and movement creators for *A Glove of Their Own*, baseball legend Tommy John and youth baseball coach Bob Salomon.

The book focuses on the passion and drive that a group of underprivileged children have for the game of baseball, despite a lack of equipment. Thanks to an agreement between Griggs and the book's authors, \$3 from each book sold will go to The Village for Families and Children in Hartford.

"We're cross-promoting each other, and in this way, strengthening the idea of sports unifying the communities," she said.

SwapMeSports.com

got another shot in the arm in August, when Clorox Company – maker of dozens of consumer and industrial products, including bleach – approached Griggs via a message on Facebook. The company was interested in working as partners with SwapMeSports.com and the Stop MRSA Now Coalition to educate the public on the dangers that the spread of MRSA in a community represents. "I knew we had to get on board," she said.

MRSA stands for methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, "a potentially life-threatening antibiotic-resistant Staph infection" that was once contracted primarily in hospitals but "has increasingly been found in community and youth sports settings," according to a Stop MRSA Now Coalition press release.

Phoenix Suns basketball player Grant Hill contracted and survived MRSA, but it sidelined him from sports for some time. He is now a spokes-

person in educating the public on this disease.

Disinfecting with bleach is already a major tool in the arsenal of infection prevention

professionals tasked with preventing the spread of MRSA and other drug-resistant pathogens in healthcare settings.

Clorox, the coalition,

SwapMeSports.com and Hill have come together to launch a Public Service Announcement campaign called, "Equip Them Well," scheduled to launch September 13.

"The goal here is to get everybody [in the community] to disinfect all sporting goods and equipment properly, and to educate the public on how prevent the spread of MRSA. On top of that, we plan to get good, clean equipment to underprivileged kids," Griggs said.

Community is the pulse to SwapMeSports.com's heart. "We are a success because of the communities that support us. Our website has a community events page because it's important that we go out and support each other. How great is it to get together as a community and cheer on a local game or team? So many times, we hear of things that we might like to attend after the fact. By posting an event on our community events page, we can more easily go and support each other!"

Given the attention and success that the company is generating both locally and nationally, it looks like SwapMeSports.com has entered the big leagues. And in this game, everybody is coming out a winner. **HM**

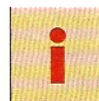
Out of this World
the green gala

www.CTScienceCenter.org/gala | (860) 520.2160

Join us on Saturday, October 16

in support of **SCIENCE** education! A chic, delicious, and eco-friendly evening celebrating the green mission of the Connecticut Science Center and the first CT gala powered by a hydrogen fuel cell. It doesn't get much **GREENER**.

Connecticut
 Science Center



SwapMeSports
tara@SwapMeSports.com