

Mug Shot

Local sportscaster turns his passion for sports into a charitable product

By Gail Martineau

Twenty years ago, Columbus sportscaster Doug Lessells invited the creator of a local product called Team Mug to appear on his NBC-4 show.

The product, a mug in the shape of a helmet, faced some struggles – distribution problems and a high price point – and didn't end up making it in the market.

But Lessells never forgot about Team Mug, and it eventually became the impetus behind HelmetMug, his latest project.

"I loved the product; I always had. But it didn't make it back then," Lessells says. "I always kept it in the back of my mind."

Three years ago, Lessells looked into the Team Mug patent and found it was about to expire. He purchased the patent and, since then, has been working to reinvent the time-honored practice of having a cool drink during a football game.

"There is every kind of can and bottle cooler and mug out there, but literally, before this, there was nothing that was both a mug and a can and bottle cooler," he says.

Lessells – who lives in Hilliard with his wife, Marie, and 6-year-old daughter, Isabella – has improved the look of the HelmetMug recently with the addition of plastic bracket facemasks and padding with team logos, and he wants it to be far more than just a drinking mug. Currently, the company sells mugs with logos from 11 colleges, including The Ohio State University, and 13 NFL teams, including the Browns and Bengals.



"I sacrificed all forms of yard work and home improvement projects for research and development – watching football games," he says. "It was a sacrifice, but I'd do it again."

Though he jokes about his product, Lessells is very serious about what HelmetMug can do – and is doing – for local organizations.

He donates five free mugs and the rest at manufacturing cost to any organization that asks to sell them for fundraising purposes. Donating the mugs for organizations to sell raises exponentially more money than just writing checks to the charities, he says.

"I knew I was going to donate 10 percent of the profits to charity," says Lessells, who recently got back into sports reporting with WSYX-6's Football Fever OSU pre- and post-game shows. "If we sell 10,000 mugs, we are going to write a \$5,000 check to some charity. And then I started thinking, what if we took those 10,000 mugs and provided them to a charity to sell? Those same mugs could generate \$50,000 in revenue."

That's exactly what he's hoping happens with BuckeyeThon, Ohio

State University's student philanthropy program that benefits the hematology/oncology department at Nationwide Children's Hospital with the goal of ending childhood cancer. HelmetMug is selling 1,000 mugs to the organization to resell and raise money.

Penn State's student philanthropy program is planning to partner with HelmetMug next year to do a similar fundraiser, and Lessells and his company already have donated to local organizations like the Stefanie Spielman Fund for Breast Cancer Research, the DRIVEN Foundation After-School Program, St. Stephen's Community House and Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

"With 5,000 to 10,000 mugs each year with 50 colleges, you could raise half a million for charity," Lessells says. "That is the big picture where we would like to be."

For more information or to purchase a HelmetMug, visit www.helmetmug.com or visit a local Giant Eagle or Kroger store or Buckeye Corner, the Buckeye Room, College Traditions, Conrad's or Station 88 at the Ohio Union. **CS**

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