

**Startup** | Vital signs of a young regional company

Oregonian  
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SB 0256

**Knubie  
Portland  
Formed October 2008**

**The product:** The Flowspoon, designed to help babies transition from liquid to semisolid food.

**How it works:** Food placed on the spoon is sucked through a hole at the end.

**What stage?** About 5,000 packaged Flowspoons are being stored in the founder's dining room. They're being sold on Amazon.com and on her Web site.

**Retail price:** \$7.99

**The founder:** Donna Houglan, 48, was born in Southern California and held her first job in a day-care center in Aspen, Colo. When that center closed in 1981 she took care of three babies at one of the mothers' homes. Since then she's worked for 20 years as a professional nanny, and counts Tim Robbins and Susan Sarandon among her former employers.

**Employees:** Just Houglan. She works as a nanny two days a week and spends the rest her time running the company.

**Where she works:** In her Southwest Portland studio apartment, using her kitchen table as an office desk.

**The idea source:** While taking care of a 6-month-old baby who got frustrated trying to suck baby cereal off a spoon, Houglan used clear packaging tape to make a spoon with a hole at its tip. "It worked like magic," she said. Realizing she had an

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Donna Houglan, founder of Knubie, displays the company's Flowspoon, designed to help babies transition from liquid to solid food.

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## Startup: Production could move to the U.S.

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idea that could be commercialized, she spent six years searching for a designer who agreed that the spoon could be made as one piece. She found Jeff Miller, director of Development Works in Portland, who helped her design the mold and arranged to have the Flowspoon manufactured in China.

**The name:** Knubie, comes from newbie, representing both a person new to an endeavor (Houglan) and a young child (users of the

company's products). Houglan added a K because she thought the result seemed Scandinavian.

**The money:** Houglan's father invested \$10,000 to develop two pending patents. Houglan used personal savings and loans to raise another \$15,000 to create the mold design and have the first 5,000 Flowspoons made and packaged.

**Her dream:** To sell worldwide and move production to the United States, employing Americans.

**Her fear:** That the slow pace of the U.S. Patent and Trade Office will delay sales in foreign countries.

**Web site:** flowspoon.com

—Jonathan Brinckman

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