

Ideas Incorporated:

Fitness Program Boosts Portland Skip Rope Maker

By Wayne Thompson Business Writer, The Oregonian

Rope Skipping is playing an important role in physical fitness programs across the country, according to a Portland sporting goods salesman who is making it his business.

Leslie Pete, who sees a future in an ancient playground art, manufactures and distributes plastic-covered skip ropes to schools, colleges and universities in 28 states.

His industry is young, but he calls it exciting, and his plant is the basement of his home. His employees are his family and the children in his neighborhood who get a kick out of testing his product.

"Skip ropes are in," he insists, leafing through recent purchase orders to prove his point.

Frank Basher Sporting Goods, 1010 SW Front Ave. Pete's employer in the sporting goods field, is the major Oregon Dealer of the skip rope.

Cagers Buy Ropes

Last July Pete's company had its greatest month, selling about eight miles of rope, including a shipment to the University of California basketball team.

Pete, a former coach, formed the company three years ago after making several sample skip ropes for the children in his neighborhood.

"I actually got the idea from Bob Giles, one of the owners of Gilwel Plastics Co., which used to be in Vancouver," Pete said

The first two jump ropes, which were then called "Chinese" Jump Rope, were sold to Stayton Elementary School, 18 miles east of Salem.

In July, Petes's three-year old company sold 28,000 feet of skip ropes in Oregon and 14,000 feet in 27 other states.

Pete's Olympic Skip Rope come on four basic sizes and 27 different color combinations. Some are made in special sizes for basketball teams and in special color combinations to match school colors.

"We're getting exceptional acceptance on our ropes because they seem to be the right weight for trick skipping and because they are more durable than normal skip ropes," Pete says.

The seven-foot rope for tots sell for \$1.0 and the 16-foot skip rope for group recreation sells for \$2.40, Pete said. "So, you can see, our company won't get rich overnight."

In its first year of operation, Les Pete Sporting Goods needed \$3,000 on the skip rope. "We hope to double that this year. I feel our potential is terrific because I know our sales represent only a 10th of a per cent of the over-all market."

Pete buys large orders – about 40,000 feet – of plastic extrusion from Sigma, Inc., Portland, and assembles the skip rope in his basement workshop at 6213 N. Haight St. "we use 'unbreakable' swivel handles and sold braided poly cord to thread each plastic segment." The plastic extrusion or tubing is cut into segments at the Sigma plant, and a half dozen workers at Pete's home can make as many as 400 ropes in one day.

"We sell mostly to physical education departments in schools, colleges and universities, but we also are getting orders from park and recreational departments and sporting goods dealer all over the country," Pete said.

One Oregon school district recently placed a single order for 1,800 ropes, amounting to almost \$2,000. "That's the kind of business we hope to be doing when more schools and colleges adopt rope skipping in their physical fitness programs," Pete said.

Give Leslie Pete enough rope and he'll try to hang his future on it.