



## Incubating Success

WRITTEN BY GERRILL GRIFFITH

**W**hen you are asked to clean out your desk and turn over your key card, it's rarely a good thing. But sometimes it's a sign that you are accomplishing some important goals.

Professor Linda Carson moved out of her old office recently, but it was a good thing. Her now-established company, Choosy Kids, was moving into new offices as a stand-alone company and full-fledged graduate of the WVU Incubator.

Many WVU alumni will remember Linda Carson as a 2003 Ware Distinguished Professor. After 30 years of service in the West Virginia University College of Physical Activity and Sports Sciences, she took a leap

and became worried about the rise in childhood obesity. After working with and studying children and witnessing the obesity epidemic continue to increase in West Virginia and nationally, Carson had a theory that a children's program with a focus on healthy living and active learning could be a significant tool in fighting the onslaught. She tinkered with ideas to create a full line of training materials for teachers including original songs, activity posters, a big furry green mascot, and other materials that encourage healthy lifestyle choices.

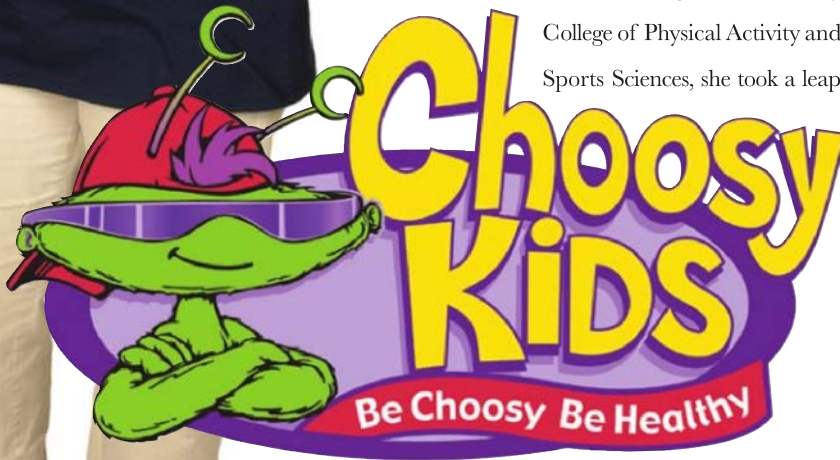
That was also about the time she received a visit from Bruce Sparks, director of WVU's Technology Transfer Office, and Dusty Gwinn, manager of the WVU Business Incubator and a WVU Law School graduate. They told her how she could turn her ideas into a successful business. Shortly thereafter, Carson gathered up those ideas, got help from WVU experts to create a limited liability corporation, and set up shop in the Chestnut Ridge Research Building's Business Incubator.

That's where she received help with the nuts and bolts of setting up a company and nurturing it for success. Gwinn said Choosy Kids received help with marketing, advertising, graphic design, finance, and accounting and other corporate services to establish early success and mature into an independent company.

to create a company that fights childhood obesity—with the help of the WVU Business Incubator. Two years after she began working with the Incubator, she was ready to conduct business on her own.

Choosy Kids began when Carson

Linda Carson fights childhood obesity by teaching children about healthy lifestyle choices. Her program is now a successful business thanks to help from the WVU Business Incubator.






Today, one of the hallmarks of Carson's young company is Choosy, a lovable children's character who reinforces health-enhancing behavior in homes, child-care centers, doctors' offices, and schools all across America. Along with a range of original materials ranging from music CDs to posters and workbooks, Choosy serves as a messenger for prevention of obesity in children.

An early Choosy Kids success was scored when the federal Office of Head Start asked the company to provide training to Head Start staff in all twelve federal regions of the country, effectively introducing Choosy to more than a half a million children nationwide.

Plans are on the drawing board for partnering arrangements with physician groups and hospital systems, and there will be more educational music, materials, and props with health, physical activity, and nutrition as key themes.

Choosy is just one success story culminating from the Incubator's efforts. Begun with support from the Benedum Foundation, the Entrepreneurship Center of the WVU College of Business and Economics, and the WVU Research Corporation, the WVU Business Incubator is home to more than a dozen young companies.

More successes are on the horizon. 

Incubator businesses like Choosy Kids have combined to create 127 full- and part-time jobs in Morgantown and have generated more than \$3 million in gross revenues in the past five years.

In addition to Choosy Kids ([www.choosykids.com](http://www.choosykids.com)), other WVU Business Incubator graduates include:

ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY APPLICATIONS



**Advanced Technology Applications** (ATA) licenses technology concepts that need additional funding for proof of concept, development, commercialization, and production. ATA licenses technology from the WVU Research Corporation and sources outside of WVU for this commercialization process.

**EyeMarker Systems** was the Incubator's first tenant. About eight years ago, WVU graduate Chris Kolanko, who holds a PhD in genetics, licensed two patents from WVU, creating what is now EyeMarker Systems. The company was developed on the premise that the eye is connected to every system in the body, and the right equipment can read the eye's attributes, or biomarkers, like a book. Kolanko was interested how the science could be applied to war, using ocular scanning instruments to detect exposure to chemical and biological toxins. [www.eyemarkersystems.com](http://www.eyemarkersystems.com)



**Mannette Steel Drums** (MSD) is an innovative company designed to meet the needs of today's steel band performers and educators. Mannette Steel Drums

founder, Ellie Mannette, also known as "the father of the modern steel drum instrument," is the mentor to the team of gifted apprentices that make up the staff. By using Ellie's legendary techniques, MSD's handcrafted steel drums are setting the industry standard with superior sound quality and craftsmanship delivered and maintained with unprecedented service. [www.mannettesteeldrums.com](http://www.mannettesteeldrums.com)



**Navway Records**, LLC, is an independent record label dedicated to discovering and developing new artists on a regional level. Derrick McKee is the primary officer in charge of producing and releasing albums, developing and enacting promotional campaigns, and coordinating live concert events. [www.derrickmckee.com](http://www.derrickmckee.com)



**Oculus Development**, LLC, is commercializing a sensor deployment system for the C-130 aircraft. Oculus works directly with WVU inventors, Homeland Security, and the military to develop sensors and applications for the system's use.



**Protea Biosciences**, Inc., develops, manufactures, and markets innovative products that improve the ability to find and characterize proteins in biological samples. This is a critical area of need, because with current technology, the majority of proteins present in blood or cell samples go undetected. This limits the ability to find new biological targets to develop new therapeutic interventions for human disease. [www.proteabio.com](http://www.proteabio.com)