

Instructor's Lullafi puts newborn sleep problems to bed

Team seeking support for Kickstarter campaign

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When Evansville resident Mike Boren met his newborn nephew, he came away with a couple of impressions: the little guy was cute as a button and the entire family never slept. “Uncle Mike” wanted to do something to help them get some rest.

“My brother was driving his son around to get him to sleep,” Boren said. “And not just once or twice, but almost every night.” The car was the only solution that worked. As a professional musician, music teacher, sound engineer and tinkerer, Boren was intrigued, especially considering the number of “sleep devices” he saw scattered around the home.

“As I investigated these products, I saw that they made plenty of sounds, just not the right ones, or in the right way,” Boren explained. “Newborns, infants and even toddlers are attuned to the sense of touch more than any other sense.”

In studying why a neighborhood drive is so effective in helping babies sleep, he quickly made connections to the womb itself. “Babies encounter a great deal of white noise in these environments, plus intermittent sound, low-frequency rumbles and pulsing sensations,” he said. He set out to design a solution that would produce the same effects, combining sounds, vibrations and delta sleep waves.

Boren and Bryan Bourdeau, instructor in the University of Southern Indiana’s Romain College of Business, play music together in an acoustic duo. After rehearsal one night, Boren showed Bourdeau a crude prototype of what would become Lullafi.

“I immediately resonated with the idea because my parents drove my brother and me around to get us to sleep,” Bourdeau said. “Lullafi is a relevant solution to a real problem that fits in the palm of your hand, and you can engage that solution at your leisure.”

Bourdeau did some homework and learned that the problem Lullafi addresses is a global one. New parents drive an average 1,322 miles a year in an attempt to get their babies to sleep, research has shown, and spend \$800 to \$1,000 on fuel. Fathers spend the most time using their cars in desperate attempts to get their little ones to bed, with the average dad driving 1,827 miles in the first year of his child’s life.

Over half of all parents admit they use their cars as a “drop-off-to-sleep” vehicle at least once a week, with the average journey lasting half an hour. “Everywhere there are roadways, cars and newborns, there’s this problem. The scalability of Lullafi excited me,” said Bourdeau.

He and Boren sought the advice of people in their networks, including Dr. Paul Kuban, USI professor of engineering. “Paul was influential in helping us determine the right considerations for circuitry and programming initially required to begin prototyping,” Bourdeau said. Kuban also helped with the schematic drawing that was taken to Blue Clover, an integrated design agency within Berry Plastics that provides design research, industrial design, prototyping and consumer testing services.

Bourdeau's brother Greg, a brand marketing professional and "Apple fanatic" who lives in Portland, Oregon, influenced Lullafi's streamlined design and assembled Lullafi's media team.

The business end of the Lullafi operation is Bourdeau, who has worked on feasibility research, federal certification, intellectual property, prototyping, financials, legal documents, product development and testing.

"My colleagues in the Romain College of Business have been so supportive," he said. "Some of them tested Lullafi with their children and we started getting positive feedback and suggestions," said Bourdeau. In his research, Bourdeau found that few competitive products exist and those don't match Lullafi in terms of quality, design and functionality.

"I'm excited at the prospect of getting back into the entrepreneurial game here in Evansville," he said. "We have all the local resources to develop an idea from conception to finished product to launch. Upon successful funding, we plan to create a few new jobs and start manufacturing, assembling and distributing Lullafi here in our region."

If you are interested in Lullafi or would like to support its Kickstarter funding campaign, go to www.lullafi.com/kickstarter.