

Everybody potties. EP Potty Pillow inventor wants everyone to be comfortable doing so



By JOANNA WERCH TAKES – December 14, 2023



Eden Prairie resident Rena Heegaard is the founder and CEO of Potty Pillow. Photo courtesy of Potty Pillow

“It’s a natural part of how we live. Everyone uses the toilet; it doesn’t matter who you are or where you come from,” says Rena Heegaard. “So it’s OK to finally bring some much-needed comfort to this space that people typically feel uncomfortable talking about.”

That comfort, Heegaard says, can come from her invention: the Potty Pillow.

Heegaard, an Eden Prairie resident since 2019, grew up in Liberia during the country’s 14-year civil war. As her family sheltered indoors for days or weeks at a time, “The bathroom became, for me, a place of refuge,” Heegaard said. “As a little girl, I remember how uncomfortable the bathroom toilet was. I would sneak a pillow in there with my granddad’s old newspapers. I would just sit there for the longest time, just to read. It was just my own way of getting away for a minute just to myself, from too many cousins, or people fleeing the war.”

Years later, as a new mom to her now-teenage sons, Heegaard said, “I found myself doing the same thing again, just sneaking to the bathroom for some mommy me-time. But it was just so uncomfortable.”

To solve the problem, she created the Potty Pillow.

“My goal is to make uncomfortable toilets a thing of the past, especially for people experiencing back pain issues, recuperating from surgery, pregnancy, postpartum,” Heegaard said. “I created Potty Pillow specifically to help people be more comfortable during those moments, and also for people who just want to get away with two minutes of mommy me-time.”

Lumbar support prevents slump

“Going to the bathroom is uncomfortable. It’s embarrassing. People don’t typically talk about that,” Heegaard said. “The toilet is hard, it is cold. You sit on the toilet, we automatically kind of hunch over, we slump. And over time, that puts strain on our lower back, and for someone who already has back issues – which affect a lot of the U.S. population already – that slumping position is just bad health.”



The Potty Pillow, she said, “bridges that gap between the hard and cold toilet and your bottom,” putting the person into a more relaxed position while providing lumbar support and helping posture.

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Although Heegaard had used pillows in her family’s bathroom as a child in Liberia, she didn’t start pursuing the idea as a marketable product until a couple of years ago. Using foam and fabric purchased from Michaels craft store, “during COVID, I sat down at my little table and I just kind of stitched something together,” she said.

“I had the prototype. It was functional, it worked – but I don’t really sew very well,” Heegaard said. She sought out a West Coast-based industrial designer who was able to translate her designs into something more product-specific.

Starting the Potty Pillow business

Over the course of the next couple of years, Heegaard worked to establish the Potty Pillow idea as a business, including registering the Potty Pillow name as a trademark; filing for design (the appearance of an item) and utility (the use of an item) patents; and finding a small, family-owned plant in India to manufacture the items.

The name idea came from her husband. “He just came up one day and said, ‘Potty Pillow,’” Heegaard said.

Research into the specific fabric used for the Potty Pillow was also important to Heegaard. “I don’t care how much you clean your bathroom, you know bacteria and germs stay in there,” she said. “So I wanted a fabric that was antimicrobial. Something that was washable, something that was easy to clean.” The Potty Pillow is now made of vegan leather.



The Potty Pillow attaches to the lid to provide back support for a person seated on the toilet. Photo courtesy of Potty Pillow

One of the most difficult aspects of refining the Potty Pillow prototypes was getting the pouch correct. The pouch attaches the item to the toilet lid.

“It was my goal that the product fit most standard toilet lids. You probably don’t know this, but toilet lids come in different sizes. It’s amazing how many different sizes of toilet lids there are on the market,” Heegaard said, including small, large, oval, round, etc.

With all of the back-and-forth to perfect the pouch and the prototype, plus several COVID-19-related shutdowns of the manufacturing plant in India, she did not get a final, approved copy of the Potty Pillow product until earlier this year. Products from the first shipments went to those who had supported Heegaard's Kickstarter campaign, which was fully funded within 12 hours of launch, and those who had placed preorders at the 2023 Minneapolis Home and Garden Show, where she had prototypes available.

“It's one of those things where I always tell people, ‘You have to experience it.’ They've got to touch it, feel it, sit on it, to really experience how it feels to have lumbar support, something comfortable that supports your back when you sit on the toilet.”

In addition to receiving feedback from customers, often grateful for the comfort the Potty Pillow provides to elderly relatives, Heegaard said that her family has been using the product since receiving the first prototypes from India at the end of 2021. “I have it in my guest bathroom; I have people coming out, ‘What is that? It just feels so good, it sucks you in.’”

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