

On Small Business

How a daughter's persistence brought out mom's entrepreneurial side



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By Alison Snyder May 8 [Follow @alisonmsnyder](#)

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Rozalynn Goodwin (right) and her daughter Gabby (center) have started a thriving young business together. (Kate Patterson for the Washington Post)

One morning while Rozalynn Goodwin was braiding her daughter's hair and stewing about the number of barrettes lost in the daily hubbub that is a five-year-old's life, she mumbled under her breath, "We have got to make a bow that works."

Her daughter Gabby seized on her mother's words: a bow that works.

It was an unassuming start to one of an estimated 9 million women-owned enterprises in the U.S.

With persistence reserved for a five-year-old, Gabby asked and asked and asked when she was going to get a bow that would stay in her hair. Mom finally gave in. “I approached it at first as a science project. We’d lay out barrettes on the kitchen table and study the features that worked.” From there, the mother-daughter team developed the design – two clips connected by a center strip that hair wraps around and then closes like an accordion and snaps on either side. “We’ve never lost a bow,” says Goodwin.

Goodwin wasn’t looking to start a business and initially focused on trying to sell the design. She approached a major company that set up a focus group to assess the idea but in the end they declined to go further. Hearing the news, Goodwin told them, “I can’t show my daughter that anything is impossible. Can you help me make one bow?”



Gabby Goodwin (right) shows off GaBBY bows to an audience of female business leaders on Friday. (Kate Patterson for the Washington Post)

A mother’s simple plea paid off. Today, GaBBY Bows are sold in 91 stores, 32 states and five countries. The company, which is based in Columbia, S.C., is looking to expand to more stores and hopes to begin licensing the design to other companies.

The young co-founder — and, as mom says, “self-proclaimed president” of the company — comes up with colors and designs for the barrettes, helps fill orders and enters data.

The best part of working with mom is “we get to spend time together,” says seven-year-old Gabby while a dozen braids swing on her head.

“That broken record in pig tails pushed me into entrepreneurship when I didn’t think I had the skills or time,” mom told judges at the U.S. Small Business Administration’s InnovateHER pitch competition on Friday in D.C. GaBBY Bows was one of 15 finalists from around the country competing for \$30,000 in prize money for entrepreneurs who are working to improve the lives of women and families.

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Goodwin wrote on her blog, “What once started as a project became a pursuit to leave a legacy of perseverance and confidence for my daughter.”

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