

# QuadAntics triples sales in two years, looks to expand to area stores

by Michelle Leach

Robert Rieck Jr. has always enjoyed wearing unusual T-shirts with funny sayings. Now the 32-year-old Lincoln man creates his own. His custom T-shirt business is churning out merchandise as sales have tripled in just two years.

"My biggest priority since opening has been saturating my storefront with new images," Rieck said. "QuadAntics went from having 10 images to now offering more than 170 images."

QuadAntics' specialty is irreverent T-shirts, but Rieck also sells custom-designed stickers, buttons, journals and notecards. The Quad in its name refers to Rieck's disability — he is a C-5 quadriplegic, while the Antics refers to Rieck's energetic personality.

Rieck has full motion of his head and neck, but his body and legs are paralyzed. Even though he does not have function of his wrists, he draws all his own designs. Rieck's first was Quad Spud — a Mr. Potato-like figure on two wheels.

"This image was a turning point for me, to know I can still channel my inner artist by drawing some good stuff using my mouth and a pencil," he said. "Before paralysis made my hands and fingers nonoperational, I loved to draw cartoons.

"With a lot of encouragement from Jessie (Rieck's girlfriend), I decided one day to pop some pencils in my mouth and completely influence the end result of what I was looking for in a design. I now find myself drawing all the images rather than communicating to Harris Decals on what I want to present."



Owner Robert Rieck Jr. with Jessie Garner, assistant designer ... Bold and clever designs are developing a following on the Internet and gathering momentum for presence in area stores.

A T-shirt which depicts the words "No Pain" emerged after Rieck's nephews consistently tested him, by pinching, squeezing and hitting him, to see if he really did not feel pain, while another design reads "Adopt-A-Quad," which, Rieck said, sends a clear message to ignorant, able-bodied people or "walkies" as he calls them.

"I can wear one of my T-shirts that says 'Damn Walkies' on a public bus with a ma-

jority of able-bodied people and by the time I get where I need to go will usually have a couple of passengers comment on how much they like my shirt as they are still laughing about it," he said. "I am able to give them a perfectly comfortable reason for them to approach me and start a conversation.

"When they read my T-shirt they usually don't have to worry about the chances of accidentally offending me. Too many times

people can develop a fear of not knowing what exactly to say, so the end result is they don't say anything at all. QuadAntics breaks the silence!"

Three years ago, as Rieck was searching the Internet, he stumbled upon a link to a storefront at CafePress.com, an online marketplace where independent sellers can create custom merchandise.

"I immediately grabbed a notepad and spent the rest of the day writing down images and shirt designs," he said. "For the first time since my disabling situation, I not only felt good with what I was doing, but I felt like I had the advantage."

In May 2005 Rieck officially opened his own storefront at CafePress.com, with the help of his friend, Tony Persons, a graphic designer and photographer who turned his ideas into portable network graphic (PNG) images.

"Months later, both of us realized he wasn't going to be able to keep up with my desire to flood my storefront with tons of images," he said.

Persons still provides images, but now most of the designs are outsourced to Harris Decals in Lincoln. Now more than 100 designs are showcased at Rieck's online store.

Over the short term, Rieck wants to continue writing QuadAntics, monthly newsletters and networking online. Rieck is working to sell his merchandise in brick and mortar stores, including gift shops like Homers Music and Gifts.

"I would like to see QuadAntics go into

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# QuadAntics triples t-shirt sales in two years

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wholesaling to local retail businesses here in the Lincoln and Omaha area," he said.

Rieck, whose business has steadily grown to include customers throughout the country without the use of a strong marketing campaign, is looking to enhance his promotion kit to attract stores that may pick up his merchandise.

Rieck is in the final stages of receiving funding from the Abilities Fund, a national organization dedicated to advancing entrepreneurial opportunities for those with disabilities.

"My advice for anyone interested in the Abilities Fund would be to cover all of your bases in your business plan," he said. "If your

business plan is complete and workable, assistance may be there but don't believe for a second you'll play the crippled card, because they don't just hand out money."

Eventually, Rieck wants to open up the shop to accommodate a wheelchair skate team and support extreme wheelchair sports like wheelchair rugby, known as Murderball.

Rieck's Web site describes his humor as a "gray area," but he said no one can argue with his sense of humor or his positive attitude which, he said, has been a cure-all.

"There's always going to be the need for mankind to have a sense of humor, and what better way to do it than with some funny tees?" Rieck said. "QuadAntics will have a following to always support this."