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EAST

EXPANDED COVERAGE OF THE EASTERN SUBURBS AND WESTMORELAND COUNTY

Pot of gold for mom

Ruffsedale widow's PottieStickers a hit

By Rebekah Scott
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RUFFSDALE — Two years ago, Tammie Aaron-Barrada hit bottom.

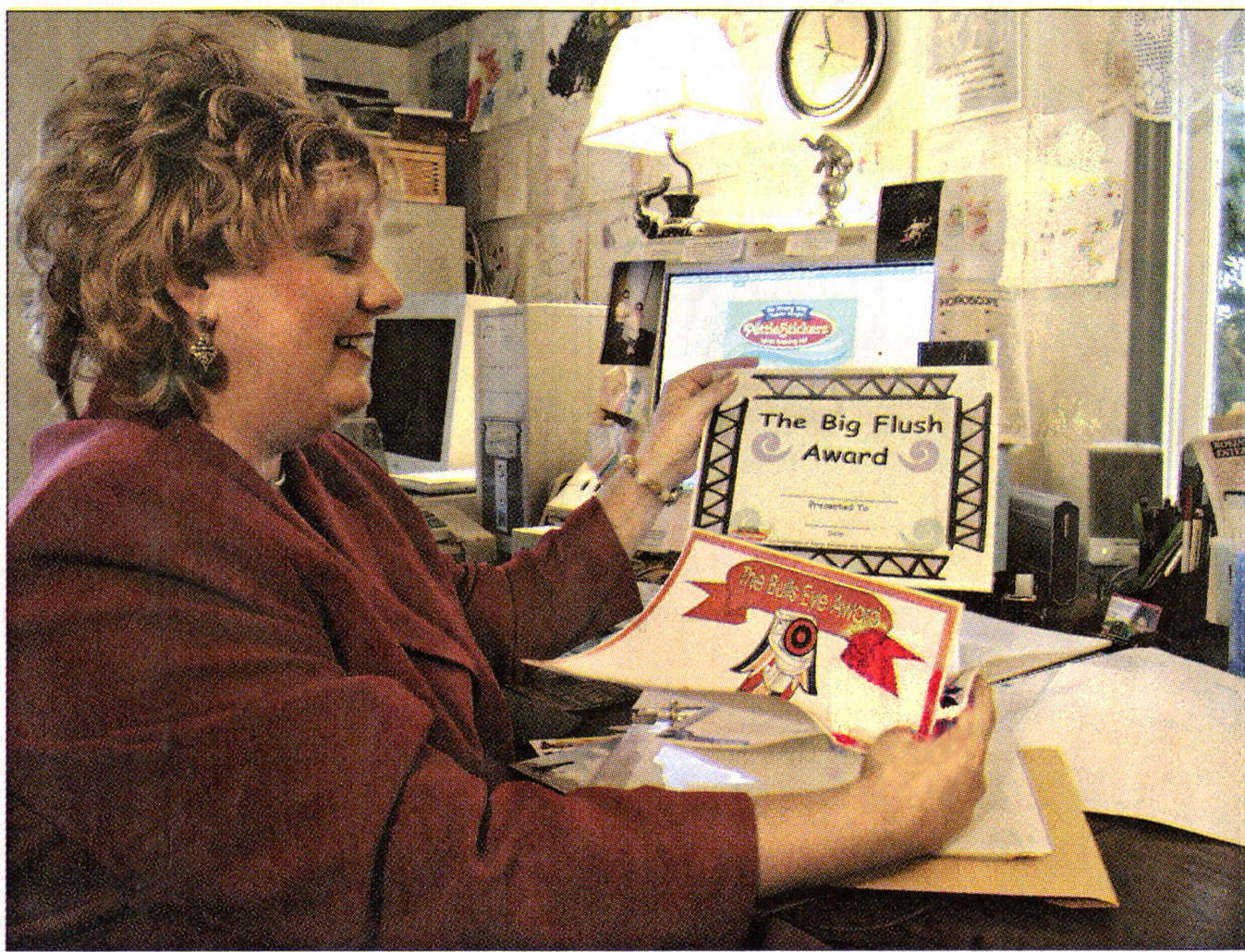
Today the Westmoreland County inventor is a finalist for a national "Stevie" award for Best New Product of 2004.

She's flush with possibilities, signing international sales contracts, making "Today Show" bookings. If everything comes out right, Aaron-Barrada will make her fortune with PottieStickers, a toilet-training method she used for her own two youngsters.

She's taken the long way to success. In the late 1990s the Turkeytown native gave up an 18-year corporate training and community-college teaching career to move to Alabama with her new husband. Two children soon arrived, and another was on its way. Life was good.

But in 2001, her new baby died. Soon after, her husband died of cancer, leaving Aaron-Barrada with two toddlers to raise. "I don't remember much about 2002," she says now.

But she did accomplish a few things. She moved to a big, blue mobile home in Ruffsedale, where she has plenty of



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Tammie Aaron-Barrada, creator of PottieStickers, a reward system for potty training with some of the certificates that are available for the kids.

family and friends to support her. And she invented an encouraging, positive way to potty-train 3-year-old Omar and 2-year-old Laila.

Instead of candy or toys, Aaron-Barrada rewarded her kids' achievements with colorful, theme-based stickers she made herself: One for sitting on the toilet, one for a pee, two for a "No. 2." When they finished in the lavatory, each child chose stickers and mounted them on a fold-up, laminated background scene drawn to match.

It was portable, creative and consistent, their mom said. And best of all, it worked.

Aaron-Barrada's an experienced inventor, she said, with about 60 other innovations waiting in a desk drawer. She knew this was a winner. Her ad-hoc board of advisers agreed.

Three artist friends started illustrating her ideas in sticker form and eventually created 12 matching sticker-and-background sets, such as tools, candy, sports equipment and mermaids. Another

friend packages them, three different sets per packet. A Connellsville day-care center agreed to test the products. When they reported seven successes with seven toddlers, she wrote a business plan and started the patent process.

"There's no wrong way to stick on a sticker," Aaron-Barrada said. "These are big and thick, easy for little fingers to handle. They're not baby-fied. The toolbox [set] has real detailed saw-teeth

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and hammer-heads. The mermaids on the underwater set have scales and flowing hair. Toddlers love detail and color. ...Working with these, they feel they're accomplishing something worthwhile. It builds self-esteem. And it gets them to use the potty."

Cathy Trout is using PottieStickers at her Ruffsedale day-care center, where the kids have declared them "cool." The little girl now undergoing training prefers the underwater scenes, Trout said.

With Omar and Leila now in school, Aaron-Barrada is in business full time, rounding up interns, approving a new line of rewards stickers and looking over construction plans for a warehouse with upstairs living space near New Stanton.

"We've only been selling for a couple of months, but I really expect at least a quarter-million in

sales by the end of the year," said the entrepreneur. And by the end of 2005, Aaron-Barrada plans to bill her first million dollars.

If she wins the Best New Product Award Friday night in New York City, expect to see her and her stickers on TV and radio, she said. The "Stevies" recognize women entrepreneurs throughout the United States, and are produced by the American Business Awards, a sort of "Oscar" for American businesses. The Ruffsedale enterprise is one of 16 finalists in the best product category. The winner gets a gold-covered statuette and plenty of national attention.

PottieStickers are available online at www.PottieStickers.com, and are popping up at day-care centers and retail baby-supply stores in the United States, Australia and New Zealand.

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