



Malcolm Denmark, FLORIDA TODAY

**Useful fashion.** Lisa Crites, right, inventor of the Shower Shirt, helps fellow cancer survivor Shannon Wiley-Watson of Cocoa put on one of her creations, a waterproof accessory that allows women to more easily take a shower after breast cancer surgery.

# Cancer survivor turns into inventor

## After a double mastectomy, woman saw need for Shower Shirt creation

BY MARIASONNENBERG  
FOR FLORIDA TODAY

The simple desire to take a shower following her double mastectomy helped kindle Lisa Crites' entrepreneurial spirit.

Frustration after her bilateral mastectomy led Crites to create the Shower Shirt, a water-resistant, anti-microbial garment that allows women to shower while preventing water from contacting surgical incisions and the post-surgical drains and tubes that are temporarily sutured into patients' bodies.

"I had just had my breasts amputated and I was told I couldn't take a shower," Crites said.

"Women have been going through mastectomies in this country for 70 years. I don't understand why this product didn't exist."

Many health care providers minimize the ordeal that taking a

shower becomes for mastectomy patients, noted Dr. Emran Imami of TEPASA Breast Center in Melbourne.

But not the 100,000 women who undergo mastectomies each year.

"Lisa's product is going to gain wide acceptance," Imami said.

When Lillian Crouch was recuperating from her mastectomy, the Titusville resident, like many other women, had to improvise to take a shower. She used a large trash bag in order to bathe and wash her hair.

Not only do these impromptu solutions put women at risk for infection, they also erode a woman's self-esteem during a time when she is most vulnerable.

"Little things like a shower make such a big difference," Crouch said.

Although post-mastectomy products are big business, as is clear when searching through

### The Shower Shirt

In Brevard County, the Shower Shirt will be available next year at the following locations:

■ Wuesthoff Home Medical Equipment, 185 Barton Blvd., Rockledge, and 401 N. Wickham Road, Suite K, Melbourne

■ Crane Creek Health First Medical Equipment, 2222 S. Harbor City Blvd., Suite 630, Melbourne

■ TEPASA Breast Center, 1140 Broadband Drive, Melbourne

#### More info

For more information on the Shower Shirt, contact Lisa Crites at 321-298-2988 or visit [showershirt.com](http://showershirt.com).

comprehensive online catalogs such as Florida-based Jodee Post-Mastectomy Fashions, the industry stands to become more

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# Invention gathers interest

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## SHIRTS, from 8C

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comprehensive thanks to newcomers like Crites.

"In cancer care, and breast cancer in particular, there are few places that provide holistic care," Imami said. "We've done a great job in the medical piece, but the practical and pragmatic aspects haven't been given as much weight."

Although the Shower Shirt doesn't officially debut until early next year, interest in Crites' invention has been high.

Crites was invited to appear Oct. 20 on Lifetime Television's "The Balancing Act" to discuss the Shower Shirt. The American Cancer

Society has agreed to carry the product in its online store and also feature it in its "TLC" retail magazine.

And Invacare, an Ohio-based international medical distributor, will position the product in both the North American market and more than 20 other countries.

But as many small entrepreneurs can attest, getting to this point was not easy, Crites said.

"I've spent more than a year on patent applications, regulatory documents, design patterns and prototypes for an overseas manufacturer," she said. "I had no idea of the red tape involved in bringing a medical product to market."

Crites served as her own guinea pig for the entire design, for although post-surgical drains are removed after about two to three weeks for most mastectomy patients, Crites faced complications and hospitalizations that required her to use the shirt for about a year.

Initially, she had wanted the shirt to be produced in the United States.

"After contacting distributors, I found that the cost would have been astronomical."

With the help of an import/export expert, Crites found a Chinese manufacturer who worked with her for more than a year to finalize the design.

Crites is negotiating with Medicare and private insurers to provide reimbursement for all breast cancer and mastectomy patients.

The garment also addresses the needs of the 60,000 patients who undergo breast reconstruction, augmentation or reduction in U.S. hospitals each year.

Unlike Lillian Crouch, Shannon Wiley-Watson was able to shower after her mastectomy, thanks to the Shower Shirt.

A friend of Crites, the Cocoa resident was one of the first women to put the Shower Shirt to the test.

"It was really nice to come home and shower and even wash my hair," said Wiley-Watson. ■