

REAL LIFE

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Apparel for babies with attitude

SARAH DEVEAU
FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

“I am a boob man.” A drooling male bearing a T-shirt with this statement might be deemed offensive — unless the wearer is six months old.

The mischievous T-shirt is one of many cheeky offerings featured in the BABYGAGS line of children’s clothing designed by Edmonton-born Shelley Foster.

Though the 32-year-old Foster has not as yet procreated herself, her business is babies.

She finished her undergrad degree and MBA at the University of Alberta, and spent a summer working in product management and marketing for Nike’s new businesses before moving to the United States in 1998. There she joined surf company Reef to manage their women’s divi-

sion and launch their apparel and kids footwear program.

When her brother had his first child in February 2002, a business idea that had been in the back of her mind finally reared its wildly funny head

“There was nothing funny or cool available,” she recalls.

Foster decided that what was needed was “alternative products for this new generation.” She began creating her own T-shirts with unprintable slogans. “The gags began to roll out from our home-spun, often in poor taste, graffiti project,” she says.

Foster launched BABYGAGS in summer 2002 after moving to San Francisco. Products include T-shirts, onesies, skull caps, trucker caps and hoodies, all for babies and toddlers. And Foster recently added sippy mugs, bibs, blankets and other accessories to the line.

“Our product line revolves around three inspirations right now: breast feeding spoofs, trash talking and political-environmental spoofs. And we update our line every four to six months.”

The company’s most popular slogans include “Milk junkie — member of Milk Alcoholics Anonymous,” and “Benevolent dictator.”

“Growing up in northern Alberta, I must have frozen a few too many times, as I find the most random things silly and entertaining,” she says.

“Much of my creative tagline writing time comes while sitting in California rush hour — stop ‘n’ go frustration can be harnessed into creative sarcasm,” she says. “Or maybe it’s the fumes.”

Foster tests her slogans on her spouse, John (who is also her business partner), but it’s her Canadian sales and mar-



Jenelle Schneider, Calgary Herald

Michelle Polusky’s son, Josh, sports BABYGAGS apparel.

keting representative, mom Colleen, whose opinion matters most.

“If she thinks they are too out of line, I know for sure they’ll be the best sellers,” she quips.

■ BABYGAGS is carried in 300 boutiques in Canada and the U.S., including Sproutz Kidz, Rock-a-Bye-Baby Boutique and Cookie Occasions in Calgary.