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## Business Update

ASU student Kevin Pringles, president of Hydro Headwear, wears a cap designed to keep wearers cool using water-soluble tubes and crystals that absorb water.  
Jennifer Grimes Tribune



## ASU students develop evaporative-cooler cap

By Tony Natale, Tribune

June 23, 2006

Acap that cools your head is making its debut in the hot Arizona sun. "It's like wearing an evaporative cooler around your head," said Kevin Pringles, 20, president of Hydro Headwear, a new company with international aspirations.

"We're introducing it in Arizona, but our goal is to market our product all over the world," said Pringles, a junior at the W. P. Carey School of Business at Arizona State University.

Pringles, his mother, Linda Cook, the company's financial manager and a senior at ASU, and Nick Montoya, a friend, sales manager and junior at ASU's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication, all of Tempe, are owners of Hydro Headwear.

The company was created in January after Pringles, his mother, an experienced seamstress who is about to receive a degree in finance, and Montoya won a \$10,000 grant from the Edson Student Entrepreneur Initiative at ASU.

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The program provides upward of \$200,000 each year to help students who want to develop ideas in the marketplace as well as those who are trying to improve the world through nonprofit, charitable programs.

The three owners share office space at the Edson Center at 21 E. Sixth St. in Tempe with 18 other entrepreneur teams that won grants for 2006.

The Hydro Headwear company, like many of the other new companies, is introducing its product as well as seeking investors, developing an advertising program and planning for growth.

"Our immediate goal is to sell between 5,000 and 10,000 caps by the end of summer, both via telephone and later through our Web site," Kevin Pringles said.

The cap was initially designed by his mother, who tried unsuccessfully to market it in 1993.

"I got the idea initially from the neck snakes that were being used mostly by children to cool off," she said. The neck coolers use the same crystals.

"But using the crystals inside caps is our exclusive idea. But at the time, I was raising a family and the idea got shelved," she said.

Her son, who is handling most of the promotions, was about 7 at the time.

"She didn't have the proper marketing program," he said. "We've since learned how to sell our product and, I hope, create a successful business."

The cap sells for an introductory price of \$20, he said. It is basically a baseball cap made of cotton with an optional brim and neck covering. Inside the top of the cap are 15 water-soluble tubes containing crystals that, when wet, expand and absorb water.

The crystals swell to 400 times their original weight then, as the water evaporates, they return to their regular size. The process is repeated with each soaking.

The crystal — acrylamide acrylate/potassium copolymer — was first used during the 1970s by farmers to increase the ability of soil to retain water. "The cap should be soaked for about 30 minutes in cool water before its worn," Pringles said. "Then, after the first 10 minutes of soaking, the hat should be squeezed to distribute the crystals evenly."

He said the tubes holding the crystals dissolve when soaked and allow them to expand.

The cap can later be waved in the air to lower the temperature and/or soaked again for another 10 minutes to continue the cooling process, which lasts throughout the day.

"When the outside air flows through the cap — and the expanded crystals — it acts like an evaporate or swamp cooler and reduces the temperature," Kevin Pringles said.

The caps, which are being assembled throughout the Valley, should be soaked in clean water before hand washing and not laundered in a washing machine or dryer.

The crystals are safe and have been approved for use by the federal government, Pringles said. "It's not just a hat," he said.

"It's a safety device, especially to help avoid heatstroke or other heat-related injuries."

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He said the primary market for the patented product are individuals who must spend time outdoors such as construction workers, landscapers, roofers, runners, hikers as well as the military.

Patrick Duran, program director of the Edson Entrepreneur Initiative program, said Hydro Headwear was given the \$10,000 startup grant after the firm submitted an application and presented plans.

The new firm has a Web site, [www.hydroheadwear.com](http://www.hydroheadwear.com), but prospective customers can only buy the cap by calling (623) 221-4980 or by e-mail at the Web site.

Contact Tony Natale by *email*, or phone (480) 898-6541

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