

## Serving spas from Atascadero

### *Life Elements finds niche with bath products*

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Not many couples can say they run their own business and are still happily married with three kids. Curt and Martha Van Inwegen have actually developed a tool to help enrich their marriage: a line of luxury bath products designed to promote passion and romance between busy couples.

What differentiates C&M Couples, named after its founders Curt & Martha, from the few other couples products on the market is that its packaging and fragrances are tasteful and appealing to both sexes, said Martha Van Inwegen, president of Atascadero-based Life Elements, the company that she established along with the products.

The lotion, bath gel, candles, linen mist, massage cream, personal lubricant and towels are not sold in adult stores, but in high-end retail stores, spas and online. The travel sets, with small bottles encased in a metal "lunch box," are being pursued by hotels, resorts and spas after the products' debut at the California Gift Show in Los Angeles from July 28 to 31 and their appearance at the New York International Gift Fair on Aug. 13 to 16.

"There was nothing that bridged the gap between spa and adult products that we could say, 'This is for us,' and not be embarrassed to leave out," Van Inwegen said. "The scents are unisex, not overly fruity or floral."

The formulas for the products are mixed by a San Francisco Bay Area-based laboratory, Prima Fleur, sometimes using as many as 10 essential oils for the scent. Curt and Martha created the combinations of oils for the scents and tested all the different possibilities along with focus groups of friends and neighbors. Their first two lines—Inspire Romance and Create Passion—use oils from rosewood, ylang ylang, lime, cedar and spearmint, just to name a few.

The C&M Web site, [www.cmcouples.com](http://www.cmcouples.com),



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**C&M Couples' most popular product, the travel set, features small bottles of lotion, massage cream and candles packaged in a "lunch box."**

gets over 70 hits a day from people searching for romantic products, couples products, honeymoon gifts and bridal gifts. The travel sets are the most popular, Van Inwegen said, and high-end hotels, resorts and spas such as the Lake Arrowhead Resort, Cal Neva Resort in Lake Tahoe and the Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn and Spa that currently sell the products in their retail stores are looking to put them in their in-room mini bars.

Kitty Arosteguy, owner of Spa Central Coast in Atascadero, said the travel sets have also been selling well at the spa's retail boutique.

"The kits sell really well—they're really cute. Couples come in from out of town and buy the [travel] kits for their weekend getaways; it adds to the experience," Arosteguy said.

Masseurs at Spa Central Coast are also helping Van Inwegen test and redevelop the C&M massage cream for professional use, which needs more viscosity and glide than personal-use creams.

With all the attention C&M has been getting since its debut, the Achievement House in San Luis Obispo is working hard to keep up with the products' packaging and shipping. The Achievement House offers vocational training for developmentally disabled adults, helping them to learn skills, self confidence and

become financially secure, said Mike Metcalf, coordinator of public relations, marketing and business development for Achievement House, which is associated with NCI Affiliates.

Metcalf said many developing businesses in the area turn to Achievement House because it's local. They are not yet big enough to hire their own labor force and their packaging and shipping needs provide work for adults who need it.

Achievement House currently has 20 to 30 adults on site, but Metcalf said NCI Affiliates just bought 2.5 acres of land in Paso Robles for a new facility and warehouse to accommodate their growing demand. They hope to begin building in 12 to 18 months.

"Martha is growing her business and at the same time we are growing alongside her," Metcalf said. "It's double success because success with Martha sells our program to other start-ups as well."

Plans for Van Inwegen and Life Elements' success do not end with C&M Couples, trade shows, mini bars and massage creams. Despite Curt and Martha's initial desire to create tasteful couples products for themselves, they do not want to focus just on romantic couples.

"Life Elements is for families and loved ones, too. The only time we touch anymore are when we're handing off keys; we're not spending enough time together to reconnect," Van Inwegen said.

The next line in the works is Ethyl & Myrtle Girlfriends, for mother-daughter spa nights and friends. Van Inwegen also hopes to launch a line for children. Besides being a tool to help bring Curt and Martha closer together as a couple, the new lines, product and fragrance testing opportunities are drawing their two daughters and son to the business as well.

"These products were created to help reestablish bonds with those we love," Van Inwegen said.