



Drew Ann Long (left) was inspired by her daughter, Caroline (seated) to push manufacturers to create shopping carts for children with special needs. Long came up with the cart design after Caroline outgrew traditional grocery cart seats, making grocery shopping trips difficult. (Photo/Provided)

Mount Pleasant firm helps produce Caroline's Carts

BY LIZ SEGRIST
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Drew Ann Long just wanted to be able to take her daughter to the grocery store.

Her frustration grew with each trip to the store as she tried to maneuver a shopping cart for the groceries and a wheelchair for her daughter, Caroline.

Caroline has Rett syndrome, a nervous system disorder that means she can't walk, talk or use her hands. As she grew older, she outgrew the grocery cart seats, making the simple task of shopping difficult for the pair.

Long, a stay-at-home mother of three from Alabaster, Ala., designed a shopping cart prototype for children with disabilities — and a Mount Pleasant manufacturer is helping to produce it.

"Grocery stores providing Caroline's Carts to their customers will be sought after by members of the special-needs community," Long, the founder of Caroline's Cart, said in a statement. "Helping families like mine and millions of others across the U.S. be able to shop with their child is an important milestone in establishing a level playing field for special-needs children."

Caroline's Carts have a place for groceries and a specially designed seat — the part manu-

factured in Mount Pleasant — for special-needs children and adults. The seat can hold an individual ranging from 35 to 250 pounds.

Five years ago, Long scribbled ideas and designs for a shopping cart onto a napkin and showed it to manufacturers. She wanted to change the shopping experience for families who have a child with a disability.

Technibilt Ltd., a Newton, N.C.-based mass shopping cart producer, originally turned her down, saying there had to be a demand for such a product. Long launched an awareness campaign to help share her story and garner support, spurring Technibilt to reverse its decision and manufacture the cart. It commissioned Multiplastics to manufacture the seat.

Manufacturing began in August, and carts have started shipping out to grocers around the country. The company plans to ship 1,000 shopping carts this year; no Charleston grocers or food retailers are buying the carts yet.

"We think that once a few bigger players in the grocery market get one or two carts per store, they'll see it as a best practice and get their own," said Jay Kramer, Multiplastics' business developer.

"It's similar to handicap parking. It started



Caroline's Carts rolling into grocery stores across U.S.

Manufacturing of Caroline's Carts began in August, with plans to ship 1,000 shopping carts this year. These grocery stores have purchased carts for their stores:

- Riesbeck's Food Markets in Ohio
- Busch's Fresh Food Market in Michigan
- Publix in Alabama and Florida
- ShopRite in New York
- Hannaford Supermarket in Maine and New Hampshire
- Strack & Van Til in Indiana
- Harris Teeter in North Carolina
- Fred W. Albrecht Grocery Co. in Ohio
- Houchens Industries in Kentucky
- Borowiak's IGA in Illinois
- A-F Country Market in Wisconsin

Source: Technibilt

with a few spots, and then it caught on with businesses as the right thing to do."

Multiplastics, a custom plastic parts producer and subsidiary of Chicago-based Curd Industries, was founded in Chicago in 1952. It moved to North Charleston in 1964 before settling into its 84,000-square-foot manufacturing facility off Long Point Road in 1986. It currently employs more than 30 people.

The company provides plastic parts for a variety of industries, such as for outdoor power equipment and operating room equipment, and plastic buoys used in marinas all over the country, Kramer said.

Technibilt's parent company, Germany-based The Wanzl Group, has more than 4,400 employees in 11 shopping cart production facilities worldwide.

"She (Long) convinced us that it was a necessary project for communities," Technibilt sales coordinator Alice Little said.

"There are lots of special-needs individuals in the U.S. It's estimated that one in six families have a special-needs person and she wanted to change the situation for herself and for others." ■

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