

Cute to a Tee

GOLF PRO'S INVENTION DESIGNED FOR KIDS (BUT USED BY ALL)
TO HELP MAKE THE GAME FUN **BY EDITH G. TOLCHIN**

EMILY BURNS of Batavia, Illinois, is a golf professional whose motto is “Make golf fun.” Her novelty invention, Squishteets, is meant to help kids (and really, anyone) become interested in golfing.

Edith G. Tolchin (EGT): Please tell us about your background and your family.

Emily Burns (EB): I am the creator and owner of Squishteets, an LPGA member and the head golf professional at Cantigny Youth Links in Wheaton, Illinois. I reside with my husband, David, and our three kids. Together we are a golfing family: David is a PGA member and general manager at Geneva Golf Club.

EGT: Your experience as a golf coach seems to have influenced your invention. Do you coach both children and adults?

EB: My position as an LPGA instructor and golf professional at a children's facility placed me in an environment that is surrounded by mostly kids. While I do teach adults, typically my lesson book gets filled with junior programs most of the year.

My approach as an instructor is to make golf fun. The bulk of my students are new to the game, and often I am their first experience with the sport. Golf is a difficult sport; teaching kids at this beginner level and age has its challenges!

While teaching my students, I was inspired to develop and design Squishteets. In fact, the first prototypes were made with the help of my students. To this day, all new Squishteets in the collection still are approved prior to manufacturing by my students. It's a must.

EGT: What are Squishteets, and from what are they made?

EB: The game of golf has grown tremendously over the years, with the largest growth being juniors. While teaching my students, I found a need for a fresh, fun golf tee. I researched junior golf tees and found little options on the market.

I began taking my sons' toys and using them as tee accessories, drilling holes into foam figures. When I saw the need and want from my students for such an item and with little else on the market for this, Squishteets was developed.

I knew that kids loved soft and squishy items and that they liked to collect things. The result was a soft, squishy polyfoam material that has a center hole in them for golf tees to slide into. Using this trendy, slow-rising foam offers golfers a familiar object to use alongside golf tees, as well as helps protect golf tees, making them easier to find and pick up after hitting.

EGT: How do you use them? Are they a novelty to encourage children to get involved in the sport?

EB: Squishteets have a center hole going through them that any traditional golf tee fits into. Golf is hard! Encouraging kids and showing them relatable objects has been a wonderful addition for my students, and the feedback from LPGA/PGA instructors who incorporate them into their lessons has been extremely positive.

Squishteets are used in many ways. Players use them while practicing or playing on the course.

As an instructor, I use them on the putting green as targets to hit. On the chipping green, they can be added as targets to hit over, and for the longer shots I have used them as a tool to hit! The cupcake Squishteets are great for students to hit, and I can stand in front to catch them.

Squishteets are made of a soft, squishy polyfoam material that has a center hole for the placement of the golf tee.





“Who wouldn’t want to hit a golf ball off a Star Wars or Minions character? How cool would that be?” —EMILY BURNS

EGT: How many different types are you selling?

EB: At the moment, I have 11 Squishteers in the lineup and more in the works to launch and grow.

EGT: Have you had any difficulties with your suppliers, or any logistics issues?

EB: Squishteers launched in 2021. As I began the company, I reached out to hundreds of manufacturers in the USA and worldwide, which came with its challenges.

I was on the phone explaining to companies about my product, vision, and how it’s used. There were a lot of “we will get back to you” phone calls. I was determined to find a company that not only agreed to help me but also saw my vision.

And the shipping was no easier! Needing low minimums, creating vector files, 3D files, purchasing molds, choosing Pantone colors—this was all very new to me. And they all came with lots of decisions to be made. Each and every one I chose for the kids, and to enhance a difficult game to make golf fun.

EGT: Where are you selling Squishteers? Website, retail, Amazon? Pricing?

EB: Squishteers are sold through our website, Amazon, Scheels and at hundreds of golf and country clubs worldwide. We have been represented in events such as the BMW PGA Championship (with a sellout prior to the weekend play). Our largest groups that we sell to are LPGA and PGA instructors who use them in their junior golf programs.

Our pricing is \$14 for a two-pack and \$19 for a variety pack of three.

EGT: How has the patenting process been?

EB: When I started my invention process, I was overwhelmed! The entire process scared me; I wouldn’t have a conversation with anyone without a signed nondisclosure agreement.

I filed a trademark and provisional patent application on my ideas as soon as I drew my first sketches. Since then, my trademark for Squishteers has been granted and I am in the patent-pending process.



The lineup for Squishtees, which can also be a collectible, is at 11 and growing.

I would be lying if I told you it wasn't challenging. The resources that the USPTO office offer as a pro-se filer are amazing, from the illustrations to the claims.

Filing was all a challenge, yet I am extremely proud that I wrote the patent all on my own. If I can do it, anyone can and should.

EGT: What's next for your company?

EB: Squishtees continues to grow and expand! I am experimenting with rubber 3D printing. This will allow me to create deeper detailed tees and hopefully lower production costs. My future goal is to be granted licensing rights with other established brands. Who wouldn't want to hit a golf ball off a Star Wars or Minions character? How cool would that be?

I am always exploring additional ways to enhance Squishtees and have begun working

with TPU, a rubbery material—which will allow for me to provide more detail, a different manufacturing process and widen the line we currently offer.

EGT: What advice can you give about inventing and product development?

EB: My advice would be to find your goal and laser focus in on it, never giving up even when you hit your low.

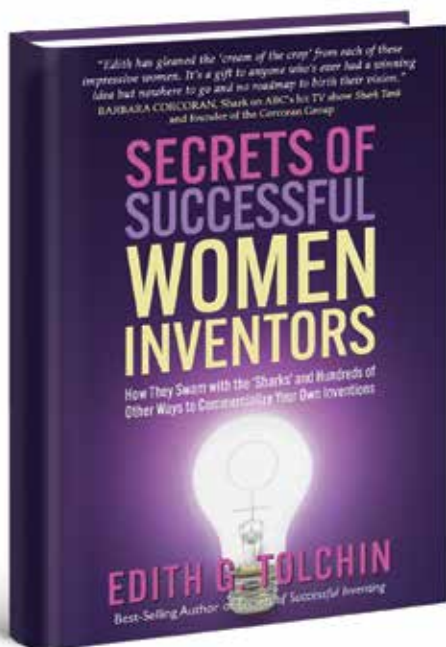
Use your mistakes as lane changes; put your heart into your product. 🍀

Details: Squishtees.com, emilyburnsgolf.com

Edith G. Tolchin has written for *Inventors Digest* since 2000 (edietolchin.com/portfolio). She is the author of several books, including "Secrets of Successful Women Inventors" (<https://a.co/d/fAGlvZJ>) and "Secrets of Successful Inventing" (<https://a.co/d/8dafJd6>).



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Edith G. Tolchin
(photo by Amy Goldstein Photography)

Edith G. Tolchin knows inventors!

Edie has interviewed over 100 inventors for her longtime column in *Inventors Digest* (www.edietolchin.com/portfolio). She has held a prestigious U.S. customs broker license since 2002. She has written five books, including the best-selling *Secrets of Successful Inventing* (2015), and *Fanny on Fire*, a recent finalist in the Foreword Reviews INDIE Book Awards.



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