

Citizen Times

Moki Door Step inventor with ties to Asheville company to appear on ABC's 'Shark Tank'

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Published 10:47 AM EST Jan 7, 2019



SHARK TANK - "Episode 1008" - First into the Tank is a husband and wife team from Newtown, Connecticut, who pitch their simple and brilliant rooftop assistance design that helps access your vehicle's roof with one easy step; entrepreneurs from Chicago, Illinois, present their fitness workout that offers a softer, lower impact alternative to the treadmill; a teen entrepreneur from West Bloomfield, Michigan, introduces his solution for making the perfect coffee at home with his cold brew kit; a mom from Walnut Creek, California, presents her simple baby seat that sits right on your hip and makes it easier to carry your baby, on "Shark Tank," SUNDAY, JAN. 6 (9:00-10:01 p.m. EST), on The ABC Television Network. (ABC/Eric McCandless) LORI GREINER, ALYSSA BROWN AND ZACHARY BROWN (MOKI DOORSTEP)

Eric McCandless, ABC

ASHEVILLE — For much of the past year, Loran Evans has been selling the Moki Door Step, an all-weather foot platform his company licenses, to retailers. But recently, those pitches came with a small caveat.

"We could say we expect it to be featured on a prominent business TV show," he said. "And you can guess what that might be."

That show, as some suspected, is ABC's "Shark Tank." Starting at 9 p.m. Sunday, the product and its inventor, Zach Brown, and wife, Alyssa, appear before tech mogul Mark Cuban, Lori Greiner, the "Queen of QVC," and Kevin O'Leary, popularly known as "Mr. Wonderful," in search of a deal to launch the product onto the world stage.

UPDATE: 'Shark Tank' recap: Connecticut couple become instant multimillionaires with doorstep sale

The platform, which helps users easily reach the tops of vehicles, hit the North American market last year following a Kickstarter campaign that raised about \$111,000 from more than 2,000 backers. That effort caught the eye of Evans, CEO of Asheville-based Rightline Gear, who contacted Brown, and in short order signed on to a partnership to sell the product at stores nationwide.

And while Evans can't divulge much about the episode due to a confidentiality agreement, he said producers clearly saw in Brown what he did — attributes, he says, which have made Brown an appealing partner.

"The producers loved his story and the fact he's a paramedic firefighter and his wife is an emergency room nurse, sort of an America's couple thing," he said. "He's an amazing guy. He has natural sales ability, and he was excellent in our booth (at the Specialty Equipment Market Association Show in Las Vegas). I would give him a job.

"You're like, 'How does this guy have so much business instinct and natural aptitude?' But he really does from working with a team on up."

Story continues below

The Rightline Gear Moki Door Step, an all-weather foot platform created by entrepreneur Zach Brown and manufactured in conjunction with Asheville-based Rightline Gear.

Rightline Gear

Evans, a Cleveland native, moved to Asheville from Atlanta to start Rightline Gear, a recreational and automotive aftermarket company, in 2008. He primarily works in marketing and product development spaces, selling products ranging from car top carriers to truck and SUV tents to Jeep weatherproof storage bags, among others. He lives in the area with wife, Sue, and daughters Amanda, 17, and Nicole, 15.

With Brown, who is based in East Hartford, Connecticut, he said he found an "excellent" product unlike any others in his stable.

They worked together to patent a version long enough for two feet to stand on in addition to placing a rubber bumper on its backside to help not damage door frames and building it with a coated hook to protect vehicles. His deal with Brown effectively is an eight-year North

American licensing agreement to sell the Moki Door Step to retailers including Academy Sports + Outdoors, Pep Boys and Dick's Sporting Goods.

Where there's room for the show's Sharks — Cuban, Greiner, O'Leary, FUBU founder Daymond John and investor Robert Herjavec — would be in extending the product's footprint into international markets, where Rightline's business is not as prevalent, Evans said.

"We have business in some countries but we don't have a vast international business," he said. "We couldn't offer instant success there where we could for him in North America."

Story continues below



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Eric McCandless, ABC

The show, in its 10th season, is a four-time Emmy winner created by Mark Burnett, of "Survivor" and "The Apprentice" fame. It generally condenses a sales pitch spanning an hour or more into 10-minute segments where its panel decides whether it's worth additional investment from them, sometimes into the millions of dollars in exchange for company equity.

The series has brokered deals totaling \$125 million in investors' cash, according to a recent USA TODAY report.

Cuban, also the owner of the NBA's Dallas Mavericks, told USA TODAY this year newer investors recognize the value of technology as well as a changing retail climate. His top-selling investment from the show is in a company called Tower Paddle Boards, a stand-up paddle board product featured in the show's third season.

"Many of our great companies also have a social component that allows consumers to be proud to do business with them," Cuban was quoted as saying this year.

Evans said what makes Brown's door step work is its way of innovating to solve an age-old problem of reaching the top of a vehicle.

Whether he makes a deal with a Shark or not, he's confident in his own investment.

"We had a very open relationship (with Brown) and that's why 'Shark Tank' or no 'Shark Tank,' he still thought us to be the right partner," he said.

Following the airing, the episode also will be available on ABC's website as well as on streaming platform Hulu.

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Published 10:47 AM EST Jan 7, 2019

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