Alumna fuses fashion and function in swimwear line

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Melissa Papock (BSM '96) is the founder and CEO of Cabana Life, a sun protective beachwear company.

As the founder and CEO of stylish swimwear brand Cabana Life, Freeman School alumna Melissa Papock (BSM '96) knows that clothing acts as a vital line of defense against summertime sun exposure.

Papock was inspired to launch the sun protective beachwear company in 2005 after overcoming skin cancer.

“When I was 26, I was diagnosed with a malignant melanoma,” said Papock. “It was caught early and was removed. But at that point, I had a huge ‘aha’ moment. My eyes were open to the dangers of the sun in a way they had never been before.”

After performing surgery on her arm to remove the melanoma, Papock's dermatologist suggested that she should start wearing sun protective clothing and provided her with a catalogue of options to browse.

"The options were very medicinal looking, so I started looking into how to make protective clothing using soft, luxurious fabrics," said Papock, who at the time, was working as a merchandising expert for fashion and beauty magazines like *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*.

"That's where the idea for Cabana Life came from," she said. "While some companies might produce a few sun protective pieces here and there, the entire purpose of Cabana Life is to provide stylish sun protection."

Now, Papock's line, which includes bathing suits, dresses, hats, cover-ups, tunics, shirts and pants, fuses fashion with function. Each piece in Cabana Life's collections for women, kids and men blocks 98 percent of UVA/UVB rays and features a vibrant print perfect for a beach getaway.

While the swimwear line has become a leading brand at retailers like Everything But Water, it is also sold by resorts and independent boutiques nationwide. Cabana Life products have also developed a celebrity following.

"It's always fun to wake up and see a photo of Nicole Kidman wearing one of your rash guards," said Papock, noting that the actress was recently spotted sporting the piece while on vacation.

— Mary Cross

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