

WorkingWoman

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POINTE OF PROFITABILITY

Ballet dancer turned entrepreneur Eliza Gaynor Minden has created what may be the Energizer bunny of dance: a toe shoe that keeps on going and going. Minden was inspired by the plight of cash-starved dance companies, whose members go through toe shoes like tissues, usually discarding a pair after each performance. By adding shock-absorbing foam and a plastic arch that dancers can heat with a blow-dryer and mold to fit, Minden propelled her eponymous three-year-old company to nearly \$1 million in sales last year, with a national wholesale and mail-order business.

"Traditional toe shoes, made of burlap, leather and cardboard, don't supply the durability that modern materials can,"



says Minden, 37, who runs the firm with

her husband, John.

Dancers from the Joffrey to the Kirov have given Gaynor Mindens a whirl, and Dance Theatre of Harlem's Lenore Pavlakos has used the shoe for the past year. "It definitely lasts longer," she agrees.

Orthopedic surgeon Lew Schon tested the shoes by simulating the stress of dancing on various pointe shoes. "Gaynor Mindens lasted 10 times as long as [industry giant] Capezio," he says. Minden argues this makes the slightly higher cost—\$70, versus \$50 for other toe shoes—worthwhile. But purists fear that foam padding will interfere with the dancer's "feel" of the floor. "Every sport has benefited from these materials except dance," replies Schon. Until now. —Melissa Schorr

Biz Buzz