

# Tami's toys

- A suburban hockey mom-turned-entrepreneur has become an unlikely film star peddling “Pure Romance” products to other housewives.

By KARA DOUGLASS THOM • Special to the Star Tribune

You might expect an X rating on a film titled “Tami Tushie’s Toys,” but the short documentary isn’t pornographic.

It’s about a stay-at-home suburban mom from Savage who happens to sell sex toys by night.

The film, one of 12 selected for the International Documentary Challenge, premiered in May at the Hot Docs International Documentary Festival in Toronto and received the Audience Award.

“People think Tami Tushie is my stage name,” the Pure Romance senior consultant and mom of four joked. But she comes by the name legally from her husband, John, who happens to be a women’s lingerie and hosiery buyer for Target. “If only he could sell directly to the public, we could team up,” she said.

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# TAMI'S TOYS

◀ FILM FROM AA1

Becoming a Pure Romance consultant was John's idea after he heard about the business on the radio. At the time, Tushie was researching a gift basket business, but John thought Pure Romance was a better business model.

"When he suggested it, I thought he had lost his mind," she said. "He told me sex will always sell. He's right, but I thought there was no way I could do it."

Pure Romance, which has been around for 17 years, is an in-home party company with 40,000 consultants who sell a "premier line of relationship aids," according to the company website. Its founder describes her mission as "helping women empower themselves and improve their intimate lives."

And the products? They include oils and creams, books and toys with names like "Mr. Dependable" and "Humbelievable."

Tushie started selling Pure Romance in January 2007 and became the highest-selling consultant in Minnesota the next year. Soon afterward, she joined the company's board of direc-

## TO SEE THE FILM

"Tami Tushie's Toys" will play at the Free Range Film Festival in Wrenshall, Minn., July 31 and other film festivals. The Documentary Channel also plans to air it soon. The film is online at [www.tinyurl.com/23f5vzo](http://www.tinyurl.com/23f5vzo).



Photos courtesy of Sarah Rubinstein

A film crew documented the two sides of Savage resident Tami Tushie's life: As a suburban stay-at-home mom by day and as the hostess of "Pure Romance" parties, where she sells sex toys, by night. Right: (from left to right): Tami Tushie, director Melody Gilbert and cinematographer Adrian Danciu.

tors. Since the premiere of the film — it made its local debut at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Film Festival in April — Tushie's team of consultants shot up from 32 to 42. Many of the new consultants had seen the film.

"It was being able to see that this kind of business is normal," Tushie said. "I'm just a hockey mom who wants to be home with her kids."

Hosting parties during her last two pregnancies convinced some women of the efficacy of her products, but having a good sex life, she said, isn't a prerequisite for being a consultant. "You have to have a passion to educate women about their sexuality and empower women to take control of their sexuality. That's what I tell people I do."

Filmmaker Melody Gilbert discovered Tushie through a friend. "I called her a few days before the filming and told her I had this crazy idea to make a documentary in five days and was wondering if we could spend a day with her to film what her life was like."

Gilbert, who directed the film with the Minnesota DocuClubbers, said she wasn't informed of the genre and theme assignments for the documentary festival until the morning of the first day of competition. The theme was "dreams and nightmares" and the genre was first-person documentary.

"We were all very excited to find out that Tami's story would fit both theme and genre, so we called her and said we'd be there by 10 a.m. We

showed up with a team of four, while a team of eight worked behind the scenes. It was crazy doing all that filming in one day."

Tushie said she was relieved her kids were well behaved in front of the cameras. "They could have done anything in an entire day of footage, and I had a live mic on me the whole time.

"What made it into the film that I didn't expect was the interview with my older kids," Tushie said. Collin, 8, explains that his mom sells lotion and soap. "I thought that's what he thought, but he can read. Thank God that's what he said."

Kara Douglass Thom is a freelance writer living in Savage.