

# HIGHFLIER

**COMPANY** **SUPERFLY KIDS** Holly Bartman started making children's capes and other superhero costume accessories with only coupons and a few scraps of fabric.

**HOW SHE SPENT IT** *Fabric, shipping supplies, thread, Velcro, adhesive. Even after her business expanded, "I didn't want to owe anybody," Bartman says.*

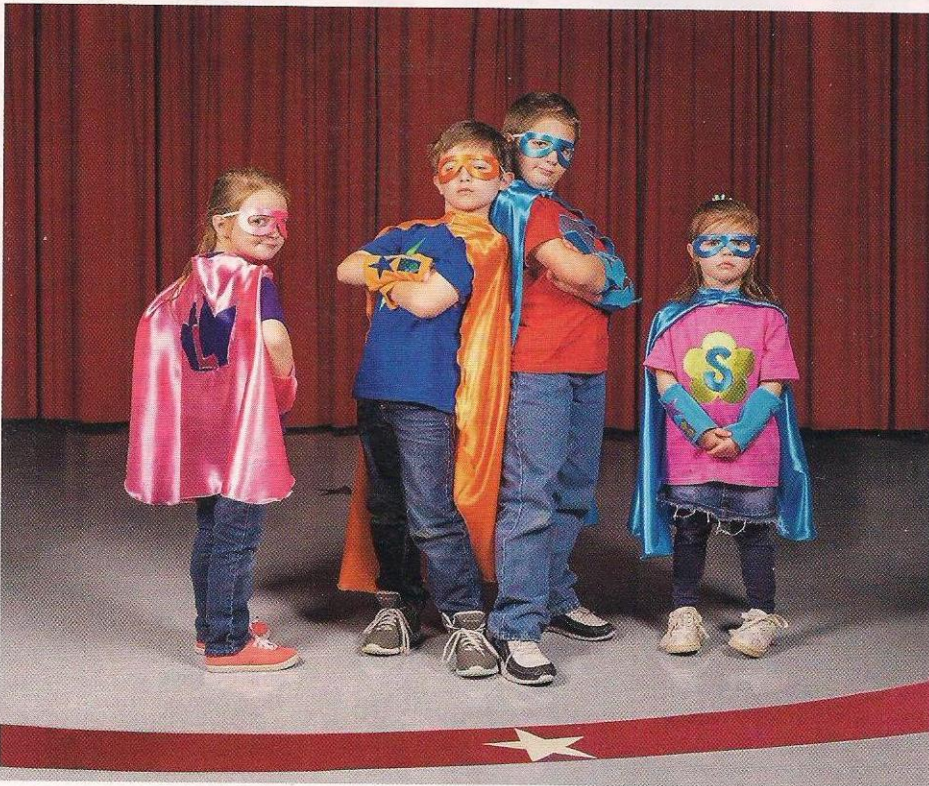
INITIAL INVESTMENT

\$100



2014 REVENUE

\$2.4 million



**UP, UP, AND AWAY** The caped crusaders of Superfly Kids show off their costumes (superpowers sold separately).

**A** SA STAY-AT-HOME mother of two, Holly Bartman was always thrifty. That's why she made superhero capes for her son Owen's fourth birthday party in 2006 rather than buy them. And that's how she got her company off the ground with less than \$100 worth of fabric and sewing supplies. At a friend's suggestion, she started creating capes at home and selling them on eBay and Etsy. An old parenting trick—coupons—saved her up to 50 percent on fabric, allowing her to make each cape for just \$5 and to sell them for \$10 to \$15. "I was just trying to make a

marketing firm in the same building. They joined forces: He brought in new orders and began handling the more mundane business details, like payroll and the website, while Bartman focused on creating new products. Today, Draplin is co-CEO and Superfly Kids occupies an 8,000-square-foot space in Livonia, Michigan, that's already feeling small for its 17 employees. Disney and FedEx are customers; Conan O'Brien ordered a batch of capes stamped with his logo for the 2012 New York Comic Con.

Bartman says she's never been tempted to borrow or bring in outside investors to make the business grow faster. "I didn't want to owe anybody," she says. "It's always, 'OK, I have this much money. What am I going to do with it?'" —P.K.

little extra money to help with the bills and go on vacation," she says. "I was not imagining a multimillion-dollar business."

But parents began spreading the word, orders began piling up, and Bartman reinvested the profits, gradually turning a hobby into a real company. At first she went store to store, searching for sale fabrics, before realizing that she could still get the coupon discount if she asked one store to order in bulk from warehouses. Then she discovered that getting a tax ID number allowed her to buy supplies, including Velcro and needles, wholesale, some of it tax-free.

Parents liked that Bartman's capes were generic, allowing kids to invent their own superpowers—and saving her from having to buy licensing rights for characters like Superman or Spider-Man. She expanded to superhero belts, "blaster cuff" armbands, custom tutus, and plush toys only as her customers requested them, saving on marketing. Meanwhile, her family and neighborhood friends served as free consultants and testers. "Giving away 10 blaster cuffs is a lot cheaper than sending them to a testing facility that would charge thousands of dollars for a fancy report," she says.

In 2008, Bartman moved into a studio. While rolling out fabric in the hallway, she met Justin Draplin, who had a

PHOTOGRAPH BY BRIAN KELLY