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### **VENTURES She's an inventor's best friend Patent lawyer helps entrepreneurs network** *KATHLEEN GALLAGHER Staff Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

Once a month in southeastern Wisconsin, three groups of inventors meet with people who want to help them.

At their core is a Milwaukee-area woman aiming to help change a culture.

Her name is **Jill Welytok**, a patent lawyer who grew up in Skokie, Ill., watching her dad invent the motion-sensitive fish that wiggles on a plaque.

**Welytok's** dad never patented the wiggling fish, but he got enough response from ads in the back of magazines for his fish and other practical jokes and novelty items to make a decent living, she said.

Now **Welytok**, 49, is throwing herself into helping others do that and more.

"If you have a good product that you can produce, or that someone else can produce within the appropriate margins, you have access to a worldwide network for promoting it," **Welytok** said.

**Welytok** is pounding on that message with what she says are more than 100 clients of the Milwaukee law firm she started in 2005, Absolute Technology Law Group LLC. She's also hammering out her message at monthly meetings of three inventors and entrepreneurs clubs that meet in Mequon, West Bend and downtown Milwaukee.

**Welytok** has been facilitating the Mequon and West Bend groups for two years. She formed the Milwaukee group last month with some prodding from David Linz, southeast regional director for the Wisconsin Entrepreneurs' Network.

**Welytok** jumped on it — no surprise from a woman who wrote six books, earned a master's degree in computer science and sat for the patent bar exam while she stayed at home raising three kids.

Since returning to work, she's started her law firm and the three inventors groups, and she's written two more books.

The books cover a range of topics, with titles such as "The Entrepreneur's Guide to Patents, Copyrights, Trademarks, Trade Secrets and Licensing." She says she has another book scheduled to come out in February, which she is writing with Louis Foreman, creator of the PBS invention series called "Everyday Edisons."

"**Jill** should be the celebration of this town. She understands innovation, entrepreneurship and how moms and pops can take their dreams and convert them into real businesses or markets — and she's honest with people about whether it will work or not," said Dan Steininger, co-director of the Successful Entrepreneur Investors group and an organizer for BizStarts Milwaukee, a nonprofit group that fosters innovation and entrepreneurship in southeastern Wisconsin.

**Welytok** says she takes just one of every five people who walk into her office as a patent client.

The clubs are a different story. They're open to the public, and **Welytok** said she works hard to make them more than networking events by providing substantive and relevant information.

On average, 30 to 40 people attend each meeting, where experts discuss topics such as how to approach corporations with an invention, what kind of designs consumers are most apt to buy and ideas for funding their projects, she said.

**Welytok** found a niche for her three groups: helping inventors get their products to market, said David Linz, southeast region director for the Wisconsin Entrepreneurs' Network.

For Linz, who is charged with helping start businesses, that means another resource to recommend to people who don't fit his mission.

"When somebody licenses their fishing lure to a company in Wyoming, that doesn't help with jobs here," he said. "But what **Jill**'s doing, that's helping. If you get this groundswell of grass-roots entrepreneurial activity, you're going to get some winners."

**Welytok**'s groups are among more than 40 that have sprung up in Wisconsin in the last seven years. The best ones are usually run by an energetic, supportive person like **Welytok**, Linz said.

There's no question **Welytok** is energetic, said Tom Bentley, founder of Robotics CNC Solutions Inc., a New Berlin robot developer.

When friends recommended he use **Welytok**'s firm for some patent work, he said he was initially hesitant.

"I walked in the door saying we want to do patents on robotics stuff, and she just tried to grab hold and understand," he said. "We hit it off because we both bounce around a lot and she could keep up."

An inventor can have the best idea in the world, but it typically won't go anywhere without business savvy and money, said Terry Whipple, executive director of the Juneau County Economic Development Corp.

Whipple organized Wisconsin's first inventors and entrepreneurs club in Juneau County in 2001 to create a "contagious" entrepreneurial environment where people could investigate ideas with group support. **Welytok** does that, he said.

"**Jill** is like Harmony.com — she is the matchmaker," he said.

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