

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Occupational Therapist Inks Exclusive US Distribution Agreement with European Orthopaedic Soft Goods Manufacturer; HandLab Spins Off BraceLab

Hand Therapy Specialist Who Helped Design the Push® MetaGrip® Brace Spins Off Independent Orthopaedic Product Distribution Business from Clinical Education Business

July 11, 2017 – Raleigh, NC – Judy C. Colditz, an occupational therapist with more than 40 years of experience specializing in hand therapy, announced today the formation of a new company and an agreement to be the exclusive US distributor of Push® Braces, which is owned by Nea International bv in the Netherlands and a subsidiary of Ofa Bamberg in Germany. Under terms of the deal, the newly formed BraceLab is the sole US distributor for Push Braces, which manufactures a range of premium orthopaedic soft goods. The products are available to clinics, healthcare providers and also directly to consumers online.

What started as a small side project – consulting for a European manufacturer to design a new brace to alleviate the painful symptoms of thumb CMC osteoarthritis – has transformed into a high growth business by helping thousands of Americans with painful thumb arthritis. Thumb CMC osteoarthritis hinders the use of the thumb in everyday tasks, such as turning a key or opening a jar, and it affects up to 40% of adults over the age of 55.

“From earning a living and craftsmanship – to hobbies that bring us fulfillment – our hands feed our soul, which is why I’ve committed myself to a long career in hand therapy,” said BraceLab Founder and CEO Ms. Colditz, OT/L, CHT, FAOTA, who turns 68 this year. “We tend to take for granted all the little things we are able to do with our hands, which makes it all the more troubling when the routine things we used to be able to do turn into a painful daily experience.”

Ms. Colditz initially began sales and distribution of Push Braces as an extension of [HandLab](#), a small education and consulting business she founded in 1996. That company is largely focused on providing continuing education for clinical hand therapists. However, the pace of demand for Push Braces had outstripped the HandLab infrastructure and so, over the course of the last year, she’s methodically laid the groundwork to launch what is, in essence, her third business venture in the field of occupational therapy (OT).

As a result, HandLab is spinning off a new business called [BraceLab](#). As the exclusive distributor of Push Braces in the United States, BraceLab will offer more than 20 different premium braces for upper and lower extremities – braces for elbows, wrists, knees, ankles, backs, shoulders, and necks. These braces are constructed from higher quality materials than those customarily used in conventional braces. In addition, Push Braces are ergonomically designed, alleviating common orthopaedic symptoms in new ways that allow more motion while optimizing function, thus supporting a more active lifestyle.

For example, the previous prevailing treatment for thumb CMC osteoarthritis required bracing that covered two or more joints (sometimes also including the wrist). While this type of bracing provided the desired stability, the bulkiness also limited mobility which interfered with daily activities such as writing, gardening, sewing, and golf, among many other routine tasks.

By contrast, the [Push® MetaGrip®](#), which Ms. Colditz helped design, covers just one thumb joint, providing freedom of movement while still offering the same symptomatic relief as legacy braces. “The smaller, streamlined design is proven to provide the same level of pain relief as larger braces, as well as allow greater function. Patients prefer it to the larger braces,” she said.

Evidence of these claims has withstood clinical scrutiny and been published in two peer-reviewed scientific journals, including [Clinical Biomechanics](#) and [Bone and Joint Journal](#). “This defied conventional wisdom because few believed this little brace would work,” said Ms. Colditz.

OT Practitioner to Educator to Entrepreneur

Ms. Colditz earned her OT stripes in the 1980s when she opened an independent clinic specializing in hands in Raleigh, NC. Her business catered to the then thriving manufacturing industry – people who worked with their hands – during North Carolina’s textile and furniture manufacturing heyday.

She opened her business, including a fully outfitted office and clinic, with just \$11,000. Through both organic growth and acquisition of a physical therapy practice, she grew her outpatient orthopaedic rehabilitation practice to about 40 employees. Among the many people she helped, was a young lawyer named Floyd B. McKissick Jr. whose arm was nearly severed in a convenience store robbery some 30 years ago. Mr. McKissick went on to become an NC State Senator and remembered Ms. Colditz and others who helped him recover, in an [expressive Facebook post](#) in December 2016.

In 1996, changes to the health care insurance and reimbursement system motivated Ms. Colditz to sell her rehabilitation practice and launch her education and consulting business: HandLab. For the next 20 years, she provided continuing education workshops for other therapists, guest lectures, and consulting services at dozens of national and international hand therapy and surgery meetings, universities, and clinics.

An instrumental aspect of her education business was the development of training and education materials available for purchase online as electronic media. She has also published dozens of juried professional papers and spoken at many professional workshops around the world. This combination would unwittingly provide her with experience, contacts, and an e-commerce vehicle that would prove invaluable many years later.

In 2007, the research and development team at Push Braces read a journal article Ms. Colditz had published on thumb bracing and invited her to consult on the development of a thumb CMC brace. This resulted in the design and launch of the Push MetaGrip, which quickly developed high demand in Europe (sold outside the US as the Push ortho Thumb Brace CMC).

As a long-time practitioner and educator who had also served in a range of volunteer capacities around the world – including as a founding member and president of the [American Society of Hand Therapists](#) and president of the [International Federation of Societies of Hand Therapists](#) – Ms. Colditz had something not easily replicated: a reputation earned over 40 years in hand therapy, industry and clinical contacts around the world, and a highly targeted mailing list.

In the fall of 2011, Ms. Colditz secured exhibit space at the annual conference of the American Society of Hand Therapists. She sent out a flyer in advance of the conference announcing the introduction of the Push MetaGrip – the same product she helped design. The response was beyond anything she or Push Braces could have imagined. Sales soared almost immediately and have been growing at a steady clip ever since.

“We had people 10 deep in our booth all waiting to try the MetaGrip and we couldn’t keep up,” said Ms. Colditz. “It’s been that way ever since and we’ve never really had to ‘sell’ the product, it sells itself.”

Since then, the business has continued to grow, leading to this announcement and the formation of BraceLab. Ms. Colditz will continue to provide continuing education to hand therapists through HandLab and will serve as the founder and CEO of both companies.

Push Braces recognized HandLab was not a typical orthopaedic soft goods distributor. But knowing the US market lacked a highly structured distribution system to support the introduction of new products, Push Braces chose to explore an arrangement with Ms. Colditz to sell the braces through her HandLab business alongside the educational materials she already produced. Until 2017, HandLab only sold Push braces for the upper extremity. The evolution to

BraceLab creates the opportunity to distribute and sell the full Push Braces product line in the United States.

About BraceLab

BraceLab is the exclusive distributor of Push® premium braces in the United States. Push braces are uniquely designed in consultation with medical experts to be anatomically correct and provide optimal support with minimal restriction of daily activities. Push braces are made in Europe with premium quality materials and workmanship for maximum comfort and durability. Most Push products utilize Sympress™, a soft, moisture-wicking microfiber material; they are machine washable and have a 90-day warranty. BraceLab is an off-shoot of HandLab, after founder and internationally renowned hand therapist and educator Judy C. Colditz, OT/L, CHT, FAOTA helped design the Push® MetaGrip®, a ground-breaking brace for thumb CMC osteoarthritis. Both companies are known for exceptional customer service. For more information, please visit www.bracelab.com.

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