

SECTION D



**Taking Shape**  
Ramzee Miller, 7 months, being examined near a mold of her head at a Cranial Technologies clinic in Phoenix. Below, she dons the DOC (Dynamic Orthotic Cranioplasty) Band, the head-shaping device she has worn since February.

Photos by Michael Chow  
The Arizona Republic

# Helping shape babies' heads

For 11 years, Jeanne Pomatto's company has played a vital role in correcting head deformities in babies

By Craig Harris  
The Arizona Republic

Rhonda Miller has become used to the quizzical looks given to her baby daughter, Ramzee, but the Chandler mother still shakes her head at some of the questions she gets.

"I had one person ask if she wore it because she falls out of the grocery cart," Miller said. "One lady asked me if I was overprotective."

The "it" is a Dynamic Orthotic Cranioplasty, or DOC, Band. It's a specially fitted, lightweight plastic helmet with an open top used to help correct deformities in babies. The bands, made in Tempe at Cranial Technologies Inc., apply gentle pressure to the heads of infants, similar to how braces are used to fix crooked teeth.



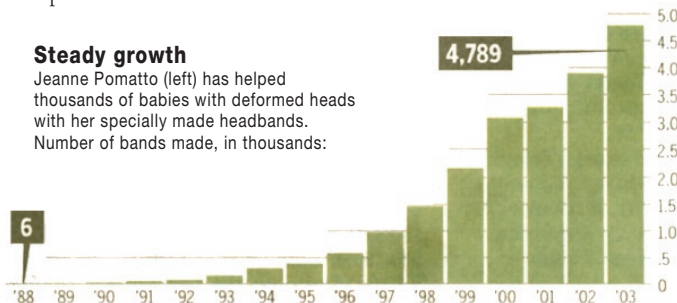
While still fairly rare, the number of bands sold has dramatically grown as doctors have sought an alternative to surgery to treat problems such as a flat head, ear misalignment and facial asymmetry.

Last year, the company, which has expanded to 19 clinics in the United States, Canada and Spain, made 4,789 bands, a 226 percent increase over five years.



**Steady growth**

Jeanne Pomatto (left) has helped thousands of babies with deformed heads with her specially made headbands. Number of bands made, in thousands:



# CRANIAL Tempe firm has grown to 19 clinics

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Chief Executive Officer Jeanne Pomatto founded the company in 1993 with just three employees, but now Cranial Technologies has 97 employees, including 30 at the Tempe headquarters. Pomatto also recently made international news by making special bands for Egyptian conjoined twins who were separated in a Dallas hospital.

Pomatto, a single mother from Scottsdale, said she is pleased that the business has grown, but what is most fulfilling is that her company has changed lives.

"The greatest joy is when you go in a (clinic) room and see the parents' faces when they see that their baby's head has changed," Pomatto said. "I don't know anything that compares."

For 7-month-old Ramzee, the DOC Band will help transform a head that is flat on the right side and higher than the left side. Her 3-year-old sister, Regen, also wore a band as a baby to correct some problems. Children wear the band from two to four months.

"People don't realize how good they are," Rhonda Miller said.

Pomatto, an orthotist who had helped children with back problems, first became interested in making the DOC band in 1986. That's when Stephen Beals, a plastic surgeon who specializes in skull reconstruction, and Kim Manwaring, a pediatric neurosurgeon, asked her to develop a custom-made product that could repair deformities in children's heads.

"It has been a tremendous help," Beals said. "This is a nice, inexpensive, low-risk alternative to surgery."

After two years of development, Pomatto made six bands in 1988. The next year, the number tripled, and in the early 1990s the product, approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, was taking off.



Dianne Hall works on a cranial protective helmet in the modifying room at Cranial Technologies Inc. in Tempe, where 30 of the company's 97 employees work. It had three employees in 1993.

Pomatto's attributes some of her company's growth to a national American Academy of Pediatrics campaign that began in 1992, when parents were urged to have their infants sleep on their backs.

While the number of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome cases dramatically fell, more babies from around the country were developing plagiocephaly, or a misshapen head. Babies also can experience head deformities from restricted in utero space, being premature or spending too much time in car seats, according to Cranial Technologies.

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***"We know that each one of these represents someone's baby," Pomatto said. "Each one is as critical as the next."***

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The company makes up to 24 bands a day, and the process begins in one of the company's clinics, where a cast of the baby's head is made. The cast is sent to Tempe, and technicians there carefully develop the band, which has a thin poly-



Leisha Perry works in Cranial Technologies' finishing area. The cranial helmets help correct head deformities in babies.

urethane liner and hard plastic cover heated at 450 degrees and specifically molded.

All the work is done by hand and then checked for quality before being sent back to the clinic.

"We know that each one of these represents someone's baby," Pomatto said. "Each one is as critical as the next."

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