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The Joy of invention

Self-built millionaire Joy Mangano joins two other judges on Made in the USA tonight to narrow down competitors who want to follow in her footsteps.

By CHASE SQUIRES, Times TV columnist
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ST. PETERSBURG - Joy Mangano invented a product, pitched it on television and made millions.

Starting tonight, she and the USA network are about to give someone else a chance to do the same.

Mangano, a Home Shopping Network success story, is part of a three-judge panel on USA's new reality show, *Made in the USA*. The show cast a nationwide net for inventors and gave them a chance - a few minutes in front of a camera - to show their wares. The prize isn't \$1-million, but something Mangano said could be even more valuable: a one-year contract with HSN.

"Just being on the show, anyone who tried out got in-depth, invaluable input, positive input," Mangano said Saturday during one of her monthly visits to HSN headquarters in St. Petersburg. "That in itself is a prize for them."

Mangano, 49, was a single mom in the early 1990s when she invented the Miracle Mop. In 1992, she persuaded HSN to put her and her mop on the air, and her life changed. Since then, she has sold millions of mops, clothes hangers, jewelry kits and other household items.

"I truly am blessed; I feel that every day of my life," Mangano said.

Knowing the power she holds, helping to decide who will get the same chance she got, is humbling, Mangano said. Sitting across the table from hopeful inventors reminds her of her own journey.

"I feel like I'm everybody out there," she said.

She may have started out like "everybody," but Mangano has emerged as one of the channel's leading personalities. On HSN Saturday, showing off her new "Comfort & Joy" collection, Mangano was as smooth as the Supima cotton in her line of bedding. For a steady hour she kept up the patter, switching easily from bedding to Huggable Hangers and My Little Steamer.

Behind the camera was a blur of activity. As the broadcast switched from a bedroom setting to a brief recorded demonstration, Mangano, HSN sales host Callie Northagen, camera operators and production assistants dashed between studios, rushing through hallways lined with boxes and tables.

Minutes later, when the live camera shot came back on, Mangano and Northagen were ready with the next

segment. Callers dialed in, producers in a remote control booth watched sales charted on a real-time graph, and Mangano had an answer for everything.

A caller who just placed an order for a bedding set, only to find herself talking live with the host, marveled, "Joy Mangano, is there no stopping you?"

Off camera, Mangano said she has been an inventor since she was a teenager, always tinkering, trying to make things better. Even with her growing array of products, her monthly trips from her home in New York to St. Petersburg to appear on HSN broadcasts, and now her new platform on Made in the USA, Mangano said she has no designs on becoming a TV star like Martha Stewart or Extreme Makeover: Home Edition's Ty Pennington.

"I will never not be an inventor first," Mangano said.

On tonight's debut of Made in the USA, Mangano joins fellow judges Karim Rashid (an industrial designer) and Nolan Bushnell (inventor of the Atari video game and founder of the Chuck E. Cheese pizza chain) as they decide which hopeful inventors get a chance at the big time. They review inventions including a clamp to make carrying plywood easier, a shower-mounted back scratcher, high-heeled shoes with removeable heels and a wheeled vomit receptacle.

The last three of the show's six episodes will be filmed at HSN's headquarters, with the winner being selected by viewers in a live episode airing Oct. 19.

PREVIEW: Made in the USA, a reality show featuring inventors hoping to break into home shopping, debuts at 10 p.m. today on the USA cable network.

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