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Peabody native seeks funds for 'monster' idea

By Jeff Shmase

Eric Black has a lofty goal, one that has eluded parents for years: He wants to provide a monster that can help kids have a good night's sleep.

The monster in this case is plush and is the brainchild of, literally, a child, his 6-year-old daughter Lyla. Black has been "toying" around with this idea for three years, ever since Lyla gave her father a monster as a gift.

Now Black has turned to the Internet to help a home-run business become more mainstream. Last month, he launched an initiative on the website kickstarter.com, that calls itself the world's largest funding platform for creative projects. Since 2009, more than 4.3 million people have pledged over \$673 million, funding more than 43,000 creative projects.

Black, a Peabody native who attended the Kiley School and the Higgins Middle School and whose mother still lives in the city, hopes his project moves to the next level through the campaign, that runs through July 14. Black needs to purchase at least 1,000 of each type of monster to get them into production, according to the kickstarter website.

The Blacks have two styles of Lyla Tov Monsters – a boy and a girl – and hope that if they succeed in their fundraising goals they can add more monsters to the repertoire and publish books with the Lyla Tov Monster (www.lylatov.com/kickstart) theme. Fittingly, Lyla Tov means "good night" in Hebrew.

The idea to mass produce the plush toys has



Courtesy Photo

Lyla Black holds two toy monsters that her father Peabody native Eric Black hopes to mass produce if he can get some funding.

been growing with the networking that Black and

his wife Erin - a two-time Emmy Award-winning costume designer – have been conducting for several years. The toy debuted at a toy fair last year, and it has been stocked in select boutiques and gift shops in the Northeast.

Black said a portion of the sales from each monster funnels back to charities.

This is not the first time that Black has taken a risk. In the fall of 1995, he moved to New York City, without a job, with the goal of working for Jim Henson Productions. Henson, who died in 1990, was the creator of Sesame Street and the Muppets and a person that Black admired.

Black, who was an English major at Vassar College, found work in the publishing industry and several months later landed a gig with Henson Productions in video post production.

It was at Henson where he met Erin.

When Lyla was 3 years old, she drew a picture of a monster that she gave to her father as a Hanukkah present. Lyla asked her mom to make it real.

That led to the first stuffed monster.

"My wife said we could sell these as good monsters that would keep away the bad ones," Black said.

Since then, the couple has been busy marketing the concept and their home has turned into a monster making site. Most nights, after they put their three children to bed, Eric and Erin are working on Lyla Tov creations.

"It's a lot of work," Black said.