

# For pants-maker, comfort was a revelation

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STAFF WRITER

Laurence Ostrow was standing in the Spokane airport with a mandolin case in his hand when he was struck with a revelation: he was wearing the most comfortable pants in the airport.

"It was like a light hit me," said Ostrow, founder and president of the Santa Cruz-based Chi Pants company.

The pants Ostrow had on,

'(Crystal-powered slacks) are both silly and captivating to a certain audience of people.'

— Laurence Ostrow

and any pair of pants on sale at Chi Pants, have a gusset panel in the crotch, rather than what Chi ads describe as the usual "restrictive, binding knot of seams."

Ostrow acquired his first pair of gusseted pants when he was teaching a movement class in northern Idaho and complained to a friend about how constricting he found his jeans.

The friend, Stacey Kuranz, sewed him what would later become the Chi Pants prototype.

Judging from Chi sales figures, her creation was a work

of genius.

Ostrow, who came to Santa Cruz in 1984 with four cartons of pants and began a mail-order business out of his apartment, now presides over a three-store chain with sales in 1987 of \$1.5 million.

"Our innovation was to cross sweat pants with jeans," the 39-year-old Ostrow said.

The combination provides comfort with a more formal look than sweat pants, Ostrow said. To the casual glance,

Chi pants look like any regular jeans, pleated slacks, or rock-climbing pants. Only the crotch is different.

In a recent innovation that has brought some notoriety to the company, Chi introduced what are believed to be the world's first crystal-powered pants.

The special new-age slacks cost \$5 more than regular Chi pants, and have a splinter-like quartz crystal sewn into the back seam just below the waist.

Ostrow said offering crystals to the cosmically conscious "is mainly just a

playful thing."

"Crystals are the junction between one type of energy and another," Ostrow explained. In technology, they do things such as transforming solar rays into electricity.

"New-age people believe that consciousness can also activate crystals," Ostrow said. He acknowledged that his own slacks were crystal-powered.

"It's both silly and captivating to a certain audience of people," said Ostrow.

He said the crystals used in Chi pants are solution quartz, meaning they are perfectly shaped at both ends and prefer no jagged edges that might fray cloth or prick skin.

The crystal-powered pants are, like other Chi pants, machine-washable.

Ostrow emphasized that the crystal-powered pants are but a small portion of Chi's business. Out of 50,000 pairs of Chi pants sold last year, only 1,100 were crystal-powered, he said.

Ostrow, who owned musical instrument stores before he was struck by his revelation in the Spokane airport, said he plans to preside over a national chain of eight to ten Chi Pants stores by the end of 1989. He currently employs 55 people, he said.

He said he will soon be

looking for a new, larger warehouse in the Santa Cruz area; Chi is outgrowing its retail and storage premises on Walnut Street just off the Pacific Garden Mall. A second store was opened in San Francisco in April last year, and a third in Berkeley last October. The company also operates through mail-

order.

Chi pants are manufactured in part at Colshire of California in Watsonville.

Ostrow said he hopes to "gusset the world." He said his product appeals just as much to the middle-aged as to younger adults.

"Most people are tired of

Levi's jeans," Ostrow contended.

He said in the Santa Cruz store, "we are even seeing the Winnebago people come through in the summer."

"People are beginning to see that they can have it all: comfort and good looks," said Ostrow.



Chip Scheuer

Chi Pants founder Laurence Ostrow and design coordinator Patty Clark