

IT'S WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW THAT CAN HURT you. Take ticks, for instance.

Most people don't know a lot about them, and they probably don't even think about ticks unless they or their pets are unlucky enough to provide a meal for one of these tiny parasites. Then, panic likely ensues because they recall that ticks can carry a rogue's gallery of diseases, of which Lyme disease is only the best known, but they don't know how to remove the critters without creating more damage.

Like a lot of people, Donna Lucente was introduced to the threat of ticks the hard way, when one caught a ride with her and gave her Lyme disease in January 2005.

Wait a minute: *January?* Aren't these bugs supposed to be dormant in the winter months? Not quite. If the weather warms just enough, they are likely to stir awake in the ground cover and go looking for a handy warm-blooded meal.

"There's always that misconception that you don't have to worry about ticks in the winter," Lucente explains. "Sure, there are not as many of them. But if you're out and about, you should still follow the same safety practices, because if it is just a little bit warmer, they're going to latch on if they can."

As CEO of TickKey International, Inc., which sells a take-anywhere tick-removal device, Lucente makes it her mission to work with retailers to help correct the many misconceptions about ticks. "We need to educate people about ticks and the

# Time to Toss the Tweezers

Outdoors, ticks are everywhere. That's why CEO Donna Lucente thinks the Original Tick Key™ should be in stores everywhere, too.



AS THE WEATHER TURNS NICER, DOG OWNERS WILL BE TEMPTED TO HEAD OUTDOORS MORE OFTEN WITH FIDO. THEY SHOULD TAKE PRECAUTIONS, HOWEVER, BECAUSE TICKS WILL BE HAPPY TO SEE THEM.

## TICKKEY INTERNATIONAL, INC.

**www.tickkey.com** | **HEADQUARTERS:** Goshen, Conn. | **SPECIALTY:** Tick-removal device | **BEST PRACTICE:** Educating people about ticks and their removal

**Donna Lucente, CEO:** "When people get to that register, [Original Tick Key™] is a really nice add on to what they're leaving with. It's one little product that can fit in one way or another with just about any retailer."

diseases ticks can carry, and why proper removal is key," she says.

Her message is particularly relevant today because people will be eager to head outside after a winter of pandemic-enforced isolation. "The outdoors has become everybody's playground," Lucente observes. "Whether you're hiking through the woods with the kids or your pets are in the yard, the [Original Tick Key] product really lends itself to the needs of people right now because everybody's outdoors."

And the ticks are happy to see them. Lucente notes that 2020 was a bad year for ticks in the United States, and 2021 doesn't look to be better. Come spring, she forecasts, "there's going to be even bigger numbers because ticks will hatch anywhere between 2,000 and 18,000 nymphs in one hatch and they need to latch on."

"You go through this whole feeding cycle in the spring that really carries through over the summer. And then you get to the next level of fall, and that's when breeding season starts."

## HOW NOT TO TICK OFF A TICK

If those facts about ticks make you feel a little itchy, then it might be time to explain Lucente's product. As its name suggests, the aluminum Original Tick Key™ is roughly the size and shape of a house key and can in fact easily attach to a keychain so users don't even have to think about bringing it along when they hike, camp, fish or do yard work.



"THIS IS A HUGE FRONT-END IMPULSE BUY [BECAUSE] YOU'RE UNDER A \$10 PRICE POINT AND YOU HAVE GREAT COLORS," LUCENTE POINTS OUT. "WHEN PEOPLE GET TO THAT REGISTER, IT'S A REALLY NICE ADD ON TO WHAT THEY'RE LEAVING WITH."

"Original Tick Key™ came about as a solution for easy tick removal from pets," Lucente explains. "Typically, people are trying to either use tweezers or fingers or whatever to remove it from a pet and the pet is squirming, and not staying still. And then people are stabbing the pet with the tweezers, and it becomes a real nightmare; [it is] really difficult to remove a tick that way."

Invented in the 2000s, Original Tick Key™ is meant to easily remove the tick with Fido not even noticing. "We developed this product that has a large opening so it can go over the tick," she describes. "When you're sliding it flush against the skin, the pet just feels like some-

body's petting them. They don't feel anything until you get to that point where the tick is in the end of the slot and you give it that final pull. That natural forward leverage removes the tick head and mouthparts from the host. So it makes tick removal much, much easier."

You can see an Original Tick Key™ in action [here](#). What's key about the device — other than it solving the squirmy dog conundrum — is that it doesn't traumatize the tick. You might think, "Who cares about the tick?" But, as Lucente explains, "If you are pinching or pulling or twisting or burning or suffocating a tick, you

traumatize it. When you do those things, a tick expels its stomach contents back into the host. And when that happens, the tick can transmit disease during removal.

"With our product, you are not actually touching the tick until you're extracting it from the host," Lucente says. "It doesn't have time to be able to say, 'Uh oh, you're annoying me.' It's that fast grab and pull, and he's out of there."

## RETAILERS AND CELEBRITIES

Lucente says the Original Tick Key™ is fast in one other regard: It moves quickly from retailers' shelves and displays.

"This is a product that I believe every retailer should have, whether it's in their pet section or their pharmacy section or their front end," she says. "This is a huge front-end impulse buy [because] you're under a \$10 price point and you have great colors. When people get to that register, it's a really nice add on to what they're leaving with."

Retailers like that the Original Tick Key™ comes in 20 different colors and can be turned into a private label product via laser engraving, she adds. "So you can now have this wonderful USA-made product that works and looks beautiful," Lucente describes. "You can have your logo on there or any other information that you want, maybe a website with your logo or a phone number, and it's a marketing tool as well" for retailers.

## DOGS AREN'T ITS ONLY FANS

Original Tick Key™ has been endorsed by physicians and veterinarians, as well as these organizations:

- Both the American and International Canine Associations
- Bay Area Lyme Foundation

In addition, it has earned these recognitions:

- Retailer's Choice Award
- Family Choice Award (three years in a row)
- "Good Morning America's" Best Health and Best Pet Product
- The European Anido Award

As a sign of how far tick awareness has come, Original Tick Key™ has been a featured product in many awards ceremonies' swag bags, including for the 2018 Golden Globes.

"We've done multiple celebrity gifting events, and I will tell you there are a lot of celebrities who have Lyme disease who are involved with Lyme disease organizations," Lucente observes, citing Lindsay Lohan and Justin Bieber. "It's a useful tool that people need. When you're putting an item in the swag bag, everything is a neat gift, but this is a useful, neat gift."

Lucente thinks the Original Tick Key™ is just as neat when it is on a retailer's display rack. "It's one little product that can fit in one way or another in just about any retailer," she says, "and it's definitely got brand recognition." 