



### **Van Dibernardo**

Van Dibernardo completed studies in Art and Design at Buffalo State College before receiving his degree in Fashion Design at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) in New York City.

Van's design career began at Unisa Shoes, where he worked with a team of designers in New York and Miami turning design concepts into actual collections. At the company's manufacturing facility in Spain, Van facilitated the production of prototype into final product. It was this experience that led DKNY to invite Van to join their design team. At the Donna Karan Company, Van designed and developed shoe collections for which he oversaw prototype development in Italy, Spain, France and Brazil.

It was during this period that Van began to unknowingly experience the side effects of multiple sclerosis: double vision, vertigo, nausea and balance issues. Later, Van was diagnosed with the disease. With world travel now difficult for Van, he remained working at the DKNY headquarters in New York City. In 2000, complications from MS repeatedly returned Van to Columbia Presbyterian Hospital, where he would stay for month-long medical treatments. Van eventually returned to Buffalo, where his parents tended to his medical care and other needs. Several years later, Van became independent enough to live on his own. His first move was to start a support group to provide emotional and educational support for those with different types of chronic conditions. Today, Van is active in the education and support of newly diagnosed MS patients who find him by word of mouth, whether referrals from other patients of MS and other chronic conditions, or from the healthcare professionals affiliated with the Jacobs Neurological Institute.

Until recently, Van moderated a monthly support group, "Chatter that Matters," that he founded in 2004. This was the time he began designing and prototyping the first style-conscious cooling vest incorporating performance and athletic fabrics instead of neoprenes, canvas and Velcro. This was a big improvement on the industrial cooling vest he wore every summer to prevent heat injury. Four years later, Van and his partners launched [Coolture](#) and are actively selling cooling vests to folks with MS and other chronic conditions throughout the United States.