

Activist slogans go over the tank top to fight illnesses

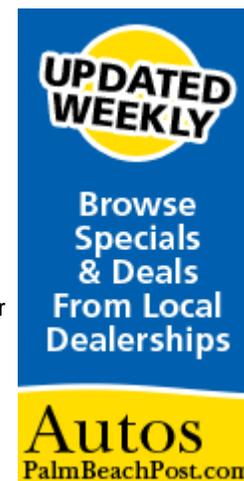
By [Susan Miller](#)

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MIAMI BEACH — For someone in a wheelchair, Sabrina Cohen doesn't sit still. The 26-year-old zips around her Miami Beach apartment, a whirlwind on wheels.

From her perch on the 24th floor with its view of Biscayne Bay, Cohen talks in rapid-fire succession about her recent trip to New York and the encounters she had with some of America's top celebs, including actor Michael J. Fox; singers Ashanti, Jessica Simpson and Missy Elliott; and models Naomi Campbell and Shalom Harlow.



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Sabrina Cohen of Miami Beach recently wooed Michael J. Fox and other celebs in New York.



Chris Matula/The Post

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FULL-TIME CAUSE: Using her background in advertising, Sabrina Cohen hopes her brazen T-shirt designs will push the causes of stem-cell research and cures for other deadly diseases.



Cohen flew there for Fashion Week, when top designers flaunt the next season's haute couture.

For this activist, the weeklong event was the perfect setting to hand out T-shirts and tank tops, raise eyebrows and start people talking about a cause that's become very important to her in the past year: stem-cell research.

To get the kind of attention she wanted, Cohen knew she had to push the envelope. Her messages are edgy and geared to the hip-hop crowd. Her new line is emblazoned with "Wanna check out my ass" for those in wheelchairs, and "My boobs are killer" for those with breast cancer.

"It had to be bold and something different. If it was simply, 'Help me walk,' no one would pay attention," Cohen said. "Every shirt has two meanings. When they get the real meaning, they are blown away."

She does have a few tamer slogans, such as "Unlock the cells" and "Forget Alzheimer's."

Cohen started selling her designs on her Web site freethestemcells.com with proceeds going to research. Her reason for going to New York was to get a celebrity to endorse her line and eventually produce her own fashion show.

"We need celebrities. That's how you get kids to listen," she said.

Although she said she received rave reviews from several celebrities, she has not received any commitments.

Cohen was just a kid when she was paralyzed in a drag-racing accident. She was one of six teenage passengers in two cars that were racing on Halloween night in 1992. She was the only one seriously injured.

Before that, "she was like a butterfly, competing in swimming, playing piano and oboe," said her mother, Evelyne Cohen.

After three months in the hospital, she returned to Miami Beach High School, got her diploma and went on to the University of Miami. She studied advertising and eventually opened her own company doing branding and logos for local real estate agents, jewelry stores and health spas.

Although Cohen's father would send her articles about stem-cell research, she said she wasn't convinced of its promise.

"I told him, 'When they find a cure, let them call me,' " she said.

It wasn't until last year that Cohen's life took yet another turn. She was at a conference where she met Bernie Siegel, founder and executive director of the Genetics Policy Institute.

"He spoke for less than five minutes, but I knew I had to meet him," she said.

Not long after, Cohen became the institute's associate director.

She has since given up her full-time advertising job and devotes much of her time to the institute, her Web site and her new venture: designing and selling her shirts.

"Sabrina is delivering a great message to a specific audience, to young people," said Siegel, who added that he wouldn't have a problem if his college-age daughter chose to wear one of her designs.



"Stem cells are for everyone, including the MTV generation. Sabrina has the charisma, personality and exuberance to be a tremendous spokesperson for the cause."

Chris Matula/The Post

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BOLD SLOGANS: 'Forget Alzheimer's' is one of Cohen's tamer sayings to get people's attention.

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