Melissa Papock, pictured, a 1996 A. B. Freeman School of Business graduate, is the founder and CEO of Cabana Life, a sun protective beachwear company. (Photo provided by Cabana Life)

As the founder and CEO of stylish swimwear brand Cabana Life, Melissa Papock knows that clothing acts as a vital line of defense against summertime sun exposure.

“When I was 26, I was diagnosed with a malignant melanoma,” said Papock. “It was caught early and was removed. But at that point, I had a huge ‘aha’ moment. My eyes were open to the dangers of the sun in a way they had never been before.”

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After performing surgery on her arm to remove the melanoma, Papock’s dermatologist suggested that she should start wearing sun protective clothing and provided her with a catalogue of options to browse.

“The options were very medicinal looking, so I started looking into how to make protective clothing using soft, luxurious fabrics,” said Papock, who at the time, was working as a merchandising expert for fashion and beauty magazines like *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*.

“That’s where the idea for Cabana Life came from,” she said. “While some companies might produce a few sun protective pieces here and there, the entire purpose of Cabana Life is to provide stylish sun protection.”

Now, Papock’s line, which includes bathing suits, dresses, hats, cover-ups, tunics, shirts and pants, fuses fashion with function. Each piece in Cabana Life’s collections for women, kids and men blocks 98 percent of UVA/UVB rays and features a vibrant print perfect for a beach getaway.

While the swimwear line has become a leading brand at retailers like Everything But Water, it is also sold by resorts and independent boutiques nationwide. Cabana Life products have also developed a celebrity following.

“It's always fun to wake up and see a photo of Nicole Kidman wearing one of your rash guards,” said Papock, noting that the actress was recently spotted sporting the piece while on vacation.