

Big Bright Ideas

STORY: VINCENT COLETTI

AND JOHN SOTOMAYOR

PHOTOS:
ANDREW
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*The next
Thomas Edison,
Alexander
Graham Bell
or Bill Gates*

*may be tinkering
in their garage on
the next big idea
right here in
Ocala/Marion
County.*



When he approached them with his idea they immediately recognized the value in his invention.

Step Up

High School graduate and roofer Faustin Gallegos believes he has come up with a multi-million dollar idea. Having worked as a certified roofing contractor for 17 years, the local business owner of FNF Enterprises, Inc in Ocala knows the inherent physical risks of the business – injuries due to falls.

According to the U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission, the number of Americans that require medical treatment for ladder-related injuries is roughly 165,000 per year. According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), 6,000 result in death.

Current laws indicate that ladders must be tied off for safety reasons. Yet there is nothing to designate what a ladder may be tied off with. This could mean a piece of rope could be the only thing standing

between someone and hours in a hospital, and millions in bills.

Gallegos created the answer to this with a product that actually holds the ladder at the base and the top. According to Gallegos, this alone could stop several workplace accidents and home accidents, which will cut medical costs, prevent severe injuries and save lives.

It was actually Gallegos' fiancé who noticed how unsafe it was for him to be on a ladder and suggested he “do something” to increase safety on ladders.

“She is the person that inspired my work,” Gallegos said. “She was a big player in bringing the idea to light and she has energized me.”

Gallegos also saw a financial benefit to business owners. OSHA continuously

hand out fines every day for safety violations. Each fine could reach \$1,000 per violation. Gallegos product would save business owners thousands of dollars in fines.

Gallegos has not wasted any time. Having come up with the idea in May and gone through a few prototypes he tested until he developed the ideal model, Gallegos lined up with a manufacturer and distributor, ABC Supply Company – a \$7 billion dollar a year company – to help shape his dream into reality. They are the largest exterior building supply company in the nation. Gallegos purchased his business supplies at ABC for years. When he approached them with his idea



His invention may have changed the portable equipment industry and is sold at electronics stores all over the world.

they immediately recognized the value in his invention.

Upon seeing Gallegos's demonstration of the product Tony Bara, a managing partner of ABC in Ocala said, "I want that product in our store." Bara then invited Gallegos to showcase his product at a vendor expo in Miami at ABC's booth. He attended the show in June 2012 and received an overwhelming positive response to his product. That's when Bara told Gallegos he could see his product flying off the shelves in stores nationwide. Other local roofers and roofing companies Gallegos knows and approached have already expressed interest and have purchase orders ready when the product becomes available on the market.

Power Up

It was through the Ocala Power Plant

and Ocoos that Gallegos met the right people to help him set up a presentation for possible buyers.

The Power Plant is a new business incubator in town through the efforts of the City of Ocala, County Commissioners and the Ocala/Marion County Chamber of Commerce. The mission of The Power Plant according to its director Kevin Reed is to power entrepreneurship by giving start up businesses the foundation to grow. Some of these entrepreneurs are also inventors. Entrepreneurs like Dr. Rahul Razdan, PhD.

Dr. Rahul Razdan has a PhD in Computer Sciences from Harvard University and is the founder of Ocoos located in Ocala. Ocoos is also an incubator for small technical businesses. It provides connection and marketing to fledgling business owners.

Dr. Razdan spent an early part of his engineering career designing microprocessor chips at Digital Imaging corp. in Massachusetts. It was there that he

worked with inventors and their inventions. After turning to the Software field, Dr. Razdan moved to Florida with his family in 2004.

While they went back and forth from Florida to Massachusetts for a few years, in 2008 Dr. Razdan made Florida his full time residency. After teaching at UF, Dr. Razdan took over a company in wireless power space called Wipower.

It was there that Dr. Razdan helped make a wireless power unit. Wireless power can be seen in several things, but perhaps most notoriously as the power mats that can charge various electrical equipment by just laying the items on the mat.

According to Dr. Razdan an invention usually comes from a need the inventor sees and then tries to solve. In the case of his own invention, Dr. Razdan saw the need for a device that organizes cell phones and other devices in one charging unit. This erases the need for several wires all going to different units.

His invention may have changed the



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portable equipment industry and is sold at electronics stores all over the world.

“Doing inventions and startups is easier now than it has ever been,” Dr. Razdan said. “This is especially because the intellectual property gained, does not require a lot of capital to begin.”

According to Dr. Razdan it does not take a lot to start up an idea, and with the market already in place it is not hard for others to copy off ideas, adding their own ideas to it.

Award Up

While sipping a smoothie at Tropical Smoothie Café, Brandon Myers and his father Bryan of Ocala thought about a product that they wanted to create.

Myers and his father owned several car lots in the area. They serviced higher end cars and while the current climate for the economy was touching even such a lucrative business, Bryan felt that he wanted to create something.

To that end the duo made a product

called Opticwash. Opticwash is the first machine system that cleans eyeglasses and sunglasses, as well as jewelry. Using a pure water solution, Opticwash both cleans and kills bacteria on glasses.

With a website online and several companies interested in Opticwash, the pair is ready to start distributing by the end of the year. Opticwash is a computerized kiosk about the size of a red box that cleans products for a dollar.

The Myers men wanted their product to be accessible to everyone. The product is simple and can be put in malls, offices, hotels and several other venues. The kiosk has a television on it that consumers can watch advertisers while they get their products cleaned.

Both men are making sure that their product is made in the United States and that Florida is the first state their product will be sold. While there are plans in the works for national distribution and even

international, for right now the Myers men want to have their business near.

“One of the main things we set up when we started this process is that we have a lot of family and friends that are hardworking, but never can seem to get a break,” Brandon Myers said. “We want to give some good, honest, hardworking people the kind of lifestyle they work for most of their lives.”

The Myers have recently received an enviable break. The Myers displayed the Opticwash at the 27th Annual InventHelp’s INPEX trade show at the Monroeville Convention Center just outside of Pittsburgh, PA on June 13-15, that showcases new products and innovations made available to industry to manufacture, license and/or distribute. The Opticwash was awarded the prestigious Grand Prix Award, netting a \$7,500 cash prize.



Vergara created a product that has had an impact on the horseback riding world.

Saddle Up

Ocalan Bernardo Vergara is the founder of Verhan saddlery. Vergara created a product that has had an impact on the horseback riding world.

Verhan Saddlery sells saddles and accessories for those in the Equine business. Their saddles are all custom made and include German Stainless Steel. The saddles in Verhan saddlery are all custom made for unique and individual sizes.

With many saddles being standard in their size it is no wonder why Verhan Saddlery has several people in the equine business talking about them. But saddles are not the only thing being sold; riding crops and several other products are available on their website verhansaddlery.com.

Vergara is just one of the many inventors around Marion County. Ideas are universal like the inventors who come up

with them. What they share is a unique perspective at seeing the world. Inventors seek a need. Once they find it, they look for a way to satisfy that need. The result is invention. And that can brighten anyone's future. 

protecting ideas

IN TODAY'S BUSINESS WORLD, inventors have to be cautious of copies of their invention. In that aspect patents have become common to gain from inventors. Patents can protect an inventor's idea from being copied by another party.

While fraud of an invention is illegal, according to patent lawyer Sven Hanson of Gainesville who services most patent law cases in Ocala, a slight tweak on an idea is not fraud. This means that with every improvement to an invention a new patent must be created.

Anyone can look up a patent search to see if an invention has a patent. Many patent lawyers and inventors agree that having a patent lawyer help with patent searching is the most diligent method of starting up a project.

The Ocala Power Plant Director Kevin Reed plans to organize a patent law session in the fall for anyone interested in learning more. For more information contact Reed at kevin@ocalapowerplant.com or call 352.484.1776.