

Local inventor takes his invention into 'The Bull Pen'



By Jim Eadie

Every day of our lives we are surrounded by other people's inventions that make our lives easier, hopefully safer, healthier and more pleasant. Everything from simple kitchen aids and gardening implements to modern communication and transportation devices, people have tried to figure out a better way. New ideas are developed and marketed, and if they have merit, someone almost immediately begins to devise an even better version. The tricky part for a modern inventor, is taking a great idea, and getting it noticed.

Local inventor and entrepreneur Henry Bickle, from Ormsby Ontario has just 'wowed' a panel of successful Quinte area businesspersons with his very simple idea that he believes will take the world by storm, and it appeared that they feel the same way.

On Jan. 19 Bickle pitched his new invention at the Loyalist College 'Bullpen', a panel of business leaders in a format similar to the popular television series 'Dragon's Den'. Bullpen is an opportunity made available through the college's 'Enactus' program that seeks to assist start-up business ideas become established within a successful business model. Project manager of Bullpen, first year business student Olivia Millard notes that the program scouts look for pitches from early stage entrepreneurs, which is followed by support in preparation of a good business plan, and coaching to develop an effective presentation.

Bickle was referred to Enactus by Hastings County's enterprise facilitation coordinator Mary Doyle. As part of the economic development strategy for the county, Doyle works on the road providing confidential and free business management coaching.

Bickle has several patented inventions to his credit, but he is most enthusiastic about his latest idea: snap-on kneepads. At first glance this may not seem to stir a lot of water 'until you hear his story.

In many industries and activities, kneepads are necessary, or would be more often used if they were not such a 'pain in the neck.' Bickle notes that the elastics around your leg cut off circulation, ventilation, cause chafing, and the pads are never in the right place when you get down on your knees. A contractor or a landscaper is constantly pulling them up or around, and sometimes to their own detriment they are tempted just to not use them.

'My snap on knee pads are everlasting comfort versus everlasting discomfort,' he said.

Bickle uses a current kneepad, but instead of strapping them on they are fitted with four snap fasteners. The kit includes enough

fasteners, which are installed in about 10 minutes on the knees of a set of work pants by the user following simple instructions. Extra fasteners are available to outfit additional pairs of pants. There is even a model for short pants.

"When you're down, the pads are right there in the right place every time," he said. "When you're up, they're out of the way .. you forget you have them on."

He has been field-testing his kneepads for some time with local contractors, and the feedback is extremely positive. Businesses that he has worked with have adopted the kneepads for employees.

Bickle holds a patent on his idea, and is hoping to take his project to the next level. He sees markets that do not exist now, especially in the recreational area, and the more occasional users who may choose not to wear conventional ones due to their discomfort.

"I am a canoeist, and I would use a pair of those .. this is a great idea," said panel member Ross McDougall, president of McDougall Insurance Brokers. "Mary (to Mary Doyle), where do you find these people with these ideas?"

"There are dozens of good ideas out there," said Doyle.

With obvious enthusiasm following Bickle's presentation, panel members offered suggestions about developing business partnerships, managing cash and inventory.

"The biggest secret, is managing logistics," said panel member Mark Hanley, of Hanley Corporation. Hanley also reminded Bickle that he could leave the manufacturing and distribution to someone else, and just collect royalties on his patent.

A few days later, after digesting everything, Bickle was upbeat. With nothing but praise for Doyle, and the Enactus program, he observed that he realizes that he can't do this all by himself, and that he needs to continue to surround himself with a team.

Then, a few days later ? a call from The Bullpen asking to meet Bickle again with a potential business partnership, and possibly other supports for bringing his invention to market.

"What do I need?" he said. "I know I need help with marketing, and logistics. I am an inventor ... and whenever I run into a problem, I won't sit there with the problem, I look for solutions. I have worked in construction for many years? I have watch people building houses, and I get ideas on how to do the job safer, easier, and better."

For a look at Bickle's inventions see: www.hbickle.com.