

This 'Knee Capper' is actually good for your knees



Limerick Township inventor Henry Bickle auditioned this month for CBC television's popular Dragons' Den show pitching his new knee protector. JIM EADIE Special to This Week

By Jim Eadie

At your first glance of Henry Bickle's sign "Knee Capper," one might be forgiven for taking a second nervous look. Thoughts of a form of torture couldn't be further from the facts in this case. Local Limerick Township inventor Henry Bickle believes he has invented the most remarkable knee protector there is, and he is calling it Knee Capper.

They are [work knee pads](#) that snap onto the pants and is always where you need it, when you need it. It also avoids the problems with conventional knee pads, such as tight uncomfortable straps, chaffing of the skin, cut-off circulation, and never staying in the right place over the knee. His invention would be an asset to anyone in the building trades, like roofers, as well as gardeners, plumbers, and "anyone who has a job that requires them to get down on their knees," said Bickle.

The snap-on knee pads have been field-tested for several years, and Bickle even knows a grandmother who snaps them on to give her grandchildren piggy back rides. He has received patents for his invention.

Exactly one year ago Bancroft This Week covered Bickle pitching his invention at the "Bullpen" in Belleville at Loyalist College. Bickle received an overwhelmingly positive response to his idea, and has been working with several Bullpen panelists to take steps to bring his invention to market. Bickle has learned a lot in the past year.

"I want to keep my own brand if possible, rather than selling the idea at this point," he said. "I realize that I have to focus on the parts of this that I can do well." A few years ago he patented a construction site wall lifter. At that time he designed and patented the lifter, rented a garage and shop tools to manufacture them, and set out across that country selling more than 200 of the devices — all that he had made — going from construction site to construction site.

"That's what I mean," he said, "you just can't do it all."

Bickle will focus on his invention and the marketing. He plans to negotiate the logistics of supply and demand systems, and has already a costing to outsource the manufacturing. He believes that he is now ready for the next step — financing.

This month, Bickle is launching a Kickstarter campaign online to try to raise some capital, as well as attract international attention to his idea. "It will be a big job for me," he said. "I have lists of businesses in Canada and the United States who use kneepads ... and I will be inviting them to try these. It is just about getting the word out."

A more dramatic fundraising opportunity came on Feb. 6. In the early morning hours before daylight, Bickle appeared at the Front Street CBC atrium to audition for the Dragons' Den television show. This show invites selected aspiring Canadian entrepreneurs to pitch business ideas to a panel of five venture capitalists, with the hope of securing financial investment or partnering to get their idea to market.

As he waited for almost three hours to pitch his idea, he created quite a stir among the crowd of hopefuls also awaiting their turn. "Before I even got on, other people there saw my knee pads on, and my display cases. Soon there were a lot of people interviewing me, taking pictures, and posting them on Facebook," he said. "I can't count the number of times that I went through my whole spiel before my number was called!"

At 10 a.m. Bickle was called and despite being told he had five minutes, was given 10. "That was a good sign," enthused Bickle. "I thought it went really well. They didn't give me any feedback ... they said not to call them, they would be calling me."

Bickle then crossed Front Street to have a coffee, still wearing his Kneecappers, when he bumped into several construction workers on a break who were very interested in his invention. They took Bickle's business card, promising to tell their boss. After all, there was always interested in how they could make the working day safer and more comfortable for the workers, whether by using safety equipment like [guard railings](#), secure scaffolding, or having sufficient breaks.

Several minutes later the construction supervisor came into the coffee shop. "I know Henry Bickle ...and I know about the snap-on knee pads," he had told his workers. It was Kirk Tripp from Bancroft, supervising construction for the Auto Show 2016 this week at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre upstairs. Bickle was invited upstairs to meet the construction gang.

"There was a three quarter acre space," said Bickle, "There were hundreds of people on their knees working without knee pads on, because they hate those other ones."

Bickle demonstrated his snap on model to a crowd of interested workers, and returned the following day with samples for them to try, hoping to get an endorsement from the workers and their union. Tripp will be travelling all across Canada doing auto shows.

"This was a really good sign," said Bickle.

"My snap-on knee pads are everlasting comfort versus everlasting discomfort," he reaffirmed. "When you're down, the pads are right there in the right place every time," said Bickle, unconsciously practising his pitch on the newspaper reporter.

Further information on the Bickle inventions can be seen at www.hbickle.com.