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Archived Story

The light goes on at 3 a.m. and Mel Lulay has an idea ... it's called Simply Dump It
By Susan T. Wehren Of the News-Times



Suzanne and Mel Lulay of Waldport demonstration how their Simply Dump It wheelbarrow handles work. The handles slip on the wheelbarrow and are secured by a screw. Plastic shims come with the handles so they can be adjusted to fit different sizes of handles. A pivot-point allows for the user to dump the wheelbarrow without losing control of the wheelbarrow's load. The Lulays are from Waldport and plans to show their invention at the Lincoln County Fair, July 15 to 18. (Photo by Susan T. Wehren)

It is 3 a.m. and Mel Lulay of Waldport is thinking.

The light goes on and he grabs the tablet and pencil by his bed. Lulay has learned that sometimes these 3 a.m. thoughts are the best ones and he does not want to lose it.

About two years ago he spent from 1 to 3 a.m. figuring out an invention that could save the backs of millions of construction workers and take some of the struggle out of the lives of weekend gardeners and do-it-yourselfers.

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Called Simply Dump It, Lulay's wheelbarrow handles are indestructible, lightweight, easy to use and solve a problem with which Lulay is quite familiar.

"Once while pouring concrete, I had a full load in the wheelbarrow. As I went to dump the load into the forms, I lost control while changing hand grip positions and spilled the load on the ground instead of into the forms where it should have been. The load was wasted," he says on his Simplydumpit website.

That is when Lulay began thinking of a solution to his problem. Two hours after turning on his 1 a.m. light Mel had the answer and he had crafted a cardboard model of what today is a fiberglass reinforced nylon handle.

Mel and his wife, Suzanne, are now ready to hit the road and begin selling their wheelbarrow handles. There have been a couple of dry runs to see what they will need for their demonstrations, and the Lincoln County Fair, July 15 to 18, will be when it all comes together.

It has been two quick years since the couple started on the path to get their handles in production. Test runs at home and with friends helped perfect the pivot of the slip on handles.

The patent search and an attorney followed. Right now the handles say patent pending as they wait for a number from the U.S. Patent Office. They have a "provisional patent" while the patent office completes its work.

During the patent search they found four other ideas for wheelbarrow handles, but none were like Simply Dump It.

They filed for the patent in November of 2003 and seven months later they had the molds made for the handle pieces, found a machine shop in the Willamette Valley and were assembling the handles and selling the product out of a warehouse in Waldport.

Everything has happened so quickly that Mel says they have worked 24-7 to get it done. "One of our biggest concerns is that (the business) will out grow us," says Mel.

The Lulays have every weekend planned this summer as they hit all the fairs and rodeos in the state. After that it will be the home and garden shows and then they will begin talking to home and garden stores about having Simply Dump It handles on the shelves of retail stores.

They now know the machine shop they have found in Corvallis can turn out 1,250 set of handles in 36 hours. They have a website up and running and can ship product from Waldport.

What they do not know is how fast their product will catch on and they are still working to figure out the best approach to marketing. Mel says he sees homeowners, the construction trades and farmers and ranchers his main market areas.

Helping them is Mel's son Larry Lulay of Turner, who has put the website together, and Suzanne's son, Aaron Ingram, helps with transportation and in the warehouse. There are also teenage grandchildren who will be working this summer at the fairs and rodeos.

Mel says he does not think pictures do his invention justice. "We have had a 100 percent positive reaction" to the handles when people see how they work, he says. People see them and say "cool invention you are going to be a millionaire. Or they say where were you 20 years ago when I was pouring concrete?" he says.

Mel is not sure if he will be a millionaire, but he is work working and learning more than he ever did before. He and Suzanne owned a hardware store in Waldport and he sold cars and automotive parts. More recently he worked at Fred Meyer.

Suzanne works for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and has had other office jobs in Newport.

Mel has the paperwork necessary to get his product on a television shopping program, but he is not sure if he is ready to do that just yet. He wants to get the sales this summer under his belt and see what is next.

One thing for sure, the pad and pencil will be by his bedside ready for the next plan when he gets it.

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