

Lifestyle

South Florida inventors put ingenuity to work

Innovative guitar stands, a freezable drink holder, an iPhone accessory that lights cigarettes, even a device that collects drinking water from the air.

Whatever your need, it seems South Florida's inventors have not only come up with a solution but they're bringing them to market, if last weekend's Inventors Society of South Florida's annual expo is any gauge.

"We [had] some really advanced things this year," said Leo Mazur, president of the Inventors Society of South Florida. "I'm very excited to see that."

Formed in 1983 and based in Delray

Beach, the Inventors Society of South Florida is a nonprofit that holds exhibits and seminars, sharing tips, resources and public exposure to help its nearly 200 members further their innovations.

Events like the expo can prove invaluable to that end, Mazur said. Two inventors showing their wares last weekend, for example, got strong leads in securing investors, and several others sold their products on the exhibit floor to interested visitors.

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— *Nicole Brochu*

Southern Flor-ideas

By NICOLE BROCHU | Staff writer

Ingenuity took center stage at the Palm Beach County Convention Center on Feb. 16, when nearly 400 people came out for a peek at 70 inventions, with patents secured or in the works. While some products were already in stores, others were still in the design or production stages, and the Inventors Society of South Florida's annual expo offered people a chance to get exposure and marketing input. Here's a look at four of the most unique ones developed by South Floridians.

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The iCap

What is it? An MP3 player with stereo speakers, voice recorder and FM tuner, mounted in the visor of a baseball cap.

Who invented it? Jeff Gesten of Lake Worth

What does it do? It allows you to listen to music "on the go," without the hassle and potential danger of headphones. The "featherweight" device comes with two songs already downloaded (ABBA's "Dancing Queen" and Lady Antebellum's "Just a Kiss"), 2 gigabytes of internal memory and a slot for a 16-gigabyte SD card. Also included: a belt clip, ear buds and a USB cord to download music.

What inspired it? Gesten said he went jogging one day wearing headphones "and almost got killed" by a car he didn't hear passing by. An inventor by trade, he decided to come up with a solution. "It's the safe way to listen to music when you're on the go because you can hear the traffic," Gesten said.

Where do I get it? It's not available at the moment. First produced in 2009, Gesten had 2,000 units made and sold almost all of them for \$100. But the Chinese manufacturer won't make another batch unless Gesten orders 10,000 units, he said, so he's looking for an investor. He did sell some leftover units at the inventors expo for a discounted price of \$30.



MARK RANDALL/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Mary Purcaro of West Palm Beach demonstrates her invention, the Cuddlecloth, at the Inventors Society of South Florida's Resources 2013 Expo.

Cuddlecloth/Cuddlepet

What is it? A bath towel that ties around your neck.

Who invented it? Mary Purcaro of West Palm Beach

What does it do? It allows you to stay dry while picking up a wet baby, or in the case of the Cuddlepet, a wet dog or cat. Just tie the ends of the towel around your neck, pick up your baby/pet and, with one hand, untie the hood-shaped end and place it over the baby's (or pet's) head.

What inspired it? Purcaro said fear of dropping her wet baby never left her, but it wasn't until her nephew was born that she began playing around with prototypes, sending them along to her sister-in-law to try. In 2010, she secured her first patent for the Cuddlecloth, and got another one for the Cuddlepet in 2012. Coming this summer: the reversible cloth-and-tote in one.

Where do I get it? Cuddlecloth.com. Retailing for \$39.95, they can be found at Palm Beach Tots in Palm Beach Gardens and Tutti Bambini in South Miami. The Cuddlecloth also is available on Amazon.com.

ONLINE: South Florida inventors offer insight into how their creations work, and how they came up with them. SunSentinel.com/Inventions

GromSocial.com

What is it? A social media site for kids.

Who invented it? Zach Marks, whose father owns a Boca Raton beverage company.

What does it do? The site offers a free, parent-monitored social networking alternative for children 16 and younger. Like other social media sites, it allows users to create a profile, chat, post photos and videos, and play games. But unlike sites like Facebook or Instagram, GromSocial.com also offers kid-friendly safety tips, tutoring help, anti-bullying and anti-drug/smoking messages, and breaking news and video on health and fitness, gaming, sports and entertainment. Monitored by adult volunteers around the clock, GromSocial.com requires parents or guardians to approve every friend their children communicate with, and "report cards" are emailed to parents detailing whom their kids interacted with and what subjects were discussed. Members older than 16 would be identified as an adult and can only become a member with the approval of another member's parent. Launched in July, the site has 16,400 members.

What inspired it? Marks, of Melbourne Beach, got in trouble for having a Facebook account without his parents' permission. Darren and Sarah Marks admit they know next to nothing about the Internet, but when they found out the kind of language and other adult content their son was being exposed to, they forbade him from the site. "I told them, 'But there are no safe sites for kids,'" said Zach Marks, now 12. So he decided to start one himself.

Where can I get it? GromSocial.com. Kids can join for free with a valid email address, home address and their parents' permission, confirmed by emailed authorization and after setting up a parent's account.



ComfiHips

What Is It? Undergarments, for men and women, fitted with honeycomb foam protection pads inserted in interior pockets on each hip.

Who invented it? Martin and Iris Onrot of Boynton Beach

What does it do? It's designed to prevent fractures in seniors and others at high risk of falling. Made of lightweight material, the pads were designed and tested with the help of the University of Florida's Department of Applied Physiology and Kinesiology, the Onrots said.

What inspired it? Martin Onrot had been in product sales in the orthopedic field since 1988, and one statistic always stuck with him, he said: About 24 percent of people who sustain fractures from a fall die within the first year. "So we wanted to come up with a product that could help people," he said.

Where can I find it? Comfihips.com. Retailing for \$69.99, each package comes with two pads, two undergarments and tips on preventing falls. Sizes range from small to XXX-large.



MARK RANDALL/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Zach Marks, 12, of Melbourne Beach, created a website for kids called GromSocial.