

NSF grant expands Inventors Council activities

The "Paddock Safety Chain" can keep several thousand pounds of trailer riding behind an automobile if a conventional trailer hitch fails. The original inspiration for the device came from a farmer in Lakeview and the prototype was manufactured by the 3-E Company of Eugene.

By MARK FRYBURG
Of the Emerald

The University's Oregon Inventors Council (OIC) is doing research that could get the innovation on hardware shelves.

The OIC exists to "assist inventors in the development and marketing of useful ideas and inventions." It has considered 596 potential products like the safety chain. Now the council's operations will expand, thanks to a \$793,650 five-year grant from the National Science Foundation. The grant was announced June 29, but no one at OIC knows when the money will arrive, or what the guidelines are for spending it.

"We can't wait for the guidelines," is the response of Dr. Leslie Shaffer, Associate Professor of Business Administration and Director of Innovation at the OIC. Presently the OIC has about 40 students — from Shaffer's "Research in Applied Innovation" class — researching several inventions each.

When Shaffer was contacted by the Emerald last Thursday, he was examining the Paddock Safety Chain (that name may change) in a corridor of Commonwealth Hall. He explained

that the five-foot device is too big to spread out in the tiny office of the OIC.

Shaffer had just completed a meeting of the OIC's steering committee and had a few moments to discuss the invention with its manufacturer and the student assigned to the case. He was travelling to Portland the next day to promote the safety chain and three other products.

Before the trip Shaffer told the Emerald:

To the best of his knowledge, the \$793,650 NSF grant is the "biggest award" the College of Business Administration has ever received.

Pending arrival of the NSF guidelines, the money will be used to expand the OIC program. The OIC provides services including a patent search which determines if the idea is original, complete cost appraisals, analysis of the market, and even contact and product promotion with a manufacturer. The future of the inventor's \$15 filing fee is uncertain. The student researchers are unpaid, but receive academic credit for their work.

Lane Community College, which inherited the program from OMSI in 1967, is now disengaging completely from the project. Recently, financial records were kept by OIC Executive Secretary Joris Johnson of LCC, and the OIC Board of Directors met there. The OIC steering committee is now reorganizing the council's administration and considering new members for the board of

directors, which passes final judgment on each invention. The board is composed of representatives of industry, government, and other groups. According to Shaffer, the NSF expects a report by Sept. 15 on the reorganization and periodic progress reports thereafter. However, Shaffer said there is no way the University can lose the grant — it's good for five years. Business school Dean Richard West has reportedly said that state and private funds should support the program when the NSF grant expires.

According to Shaffer and Ron Creswick, OIC public relations director, the NSF fund was discovered last fall through a continuous monitoring of government money sources.

Two other schools are in the NSF program: the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Carnegie Technical Institute at Pittsburgh, Pa. The purpose of the NSF's Experimental Research and Development Incentives Program is to "develop the technical potential of the people in this country," Shaffer said. As far as he's concerned the University's program will "lead the pack." Shaffer claims that the University has the only innovation research and promotion program in the country that "utilizes students to do all the research in the projects."

The Oregon Inventors Council provides a service that many inventors and small companies

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