

Research, market strategy included

Innovation Center offers aid to inventors

By LORA CUYKENDALL
Of the Emerald

When two Oregon brothers came up with an idea for a product which would automatically regulate bath water temperatures, they knew they had a good idea. But Virgil and Mark Carpenter also knew they had a long, hard road to travel to market their idea.

Virgil Carpenter came to the Experimental Center for the Advancement of Invention and Innovation at the University's business school for aid and advice. With the center's assistance, the brothers perfected their Temp-A-Bath and have since seen 500 of the items produced and a Portland hotel and rest home install the regulator in their facilities.

"A new idea has a long road to go before it turns into a product," says Deb McCaig, senior project coordinator of the Innovation Center. "Our job is to help make it easier."

The Innovation Center, located in 107 Gilbert Hall, is one of only three such experimental centers in the nation. Started in 1973 by a five-year grant of \$790,000 from

the National Science Foundation, the center is geared toward helping the amateur inventor market his ideas to business and industry.

Other centers are located at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Carnegie-Mellon and are primarily concerned with developing their own new product research or studying companies already in existence. Only the Oregon center actively solicits inventions and ideas from the general public.

Why was Oregon singled out as the site for this experimental project? According to McCaig, the Oregon Inventors Council (OIC), created in 1962 by then Gov. Mark Hatfield, may have been a magnet drawing the Science Foundation's attention to the University.

"Oregon was able to show the Foundation that it already had a project operating very much like the one they wanted to set up," says David Whitbread, president of the OIC, which has since been renamed the Western Inventors Council. "The OIC had combined the resources of business professionals with the resources of the University."

In the two-and-a-half years the center has been operating, it has assisted more than 1,000 inventors and businessmen. According to center director Gerald Udell, nearly half the center's requests for assistance come from residents of other states, due to newspaper articles about the center which appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* and *National Observer* in early 1975.

For a \$25 fee, the Innovation Center will evaluate an inventor's idea and advise him on whether or not the idea is feasible or deserving of further research. If the center feels the innovation has possibilities, it will offer to conduct further research and to develop marketing strategies for the inventor. The center performs these additional services in exchange for a royalty agreement.

According to McCaig, the center is a real bargain. She estimates the cost of an evaluation to be nearly \$200. "We hope to reach the point where royalties will pay for our operating costs," says McCaig. The center's science foundation grant expires in 1978. Although the center is eager to

receive innovative ideas and products, its evaluations are usually discouraging. Udell says national research shows that only two to three per cent of all ideas ever get into the marketplace.

"If our center successfully introduced two per cent of all the ideas we get into the marketplace, we'd be delighted," he says. "One per cent would be more realistic." As well as serving as a guardian

angel for the amateur inventor, the center provides educational and research services. Although it is not directly funded by the University, the center sponsors classes in innovation research and development in exchange for campus office space. The center also sponsors two practicums in which students conduct evaluation and market research on the ideas and products submitted to the center for study.

For inventors: 'The connections are invaluable'

"The inventor has only one real hope—that's to be able to find honest people to deal with."

So says Wally Peterson, a University student-inventor who has recently found that honest assistance at the University's Experimental Center for the Advancement of Invention and Innovation.

Peterson, a doctoral student in curriculum and instruction, has developed a bicycle which has "an infinitely variable drive system." According to Peterson, the bicycle is not a five-speed or 10-speed, but rather is one whose gear system automatically adjusts for up and down grades much like a car's automatic transmission.

"With my invention a 90-year-old man, provided he could move his legs, could carry 1,000 pounds to the top of a high hill on a bicycle," says Peterson.

But the 90-year-old man will never see Peterson's bicycle unless the inventor can find a buyer for his idea. Although Peterson has already put together a five-man team devoted to marketing his invention, he, like some 1,000 other inventors, has found that the Innovation Center has resources he can't duplicate.

"The center had the head of

Oregon State University's mechanical engineering department come to Eugene to evaluate my idea," he says. The engineer's advice was something that would not have been available to him without the center, says Peterson.

The center is now approaching prospective customers with Peterson's ideas. "They have connections which are invaluable," he says.

Peterson is not the only member of the University community who has taken advantage of the special services the Center provides. Business Prof. Larry Richards, whose one-piece black walnut picture frames are already being handled by several Northwest wholesalers and distributors, found that the Innovation Center was able to develop some additional markets for his product.

"They came up with the idea of selling the frames to professional photographers," he says. "It opened up another market to the product."

According to center representatives, less than 10 per cent of the ideas submitted come from University students or faculty. "We're hoping that number will increase," says center staff member Deb McCaig.

NEW LOW ART PRICES

FABER-CASTELL T.G. PENS PRICE REDUCTIONS

Size 00 to 7	NOW \$6.25	reg. \$7.50
Points	NOW \$3.49	reg. \$4.00
Sets #4	\$23.95	reg. \$27.00
#7	\$39.85	reg. \$45.00
#9	49.95	reg. \$56.00
	and more!	

CLEARPRINT

Pads & Rolls Reduced
8½ x 11—\$2.45 Reg. \$2.75
11 x 17—\$4.65 Reg. \$5.30
17 x 22—\$8.50 Reg. \$9.65

5 yds. x 18"—\$1.45 Reg. \$1.65
20 yds. x 24"—\$7.25 Reg. \$8.25

Entire Stock Similarly Reduced

KOH-I-NOR RAPIDOGRAPH PENS

size 00 to 4	REDUCED	
Points	NOW \$5.69	reg. \$6.50
Sets #3	NOW \$3.30	reg. \$6.50
#4	\$23.50	reg. \$26.50
#7	\$26.95	reg. \$31.00
#8	\$32.95	reg. \$37.50
	\$36.95	reg. \$42.00

SIMMONS BRUSHES

Reduced
up to **25%**

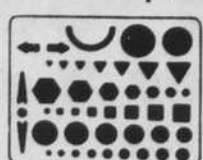
Strathmore Artist Pads
Reduced Up to **25%**
All Sizes

**Look, Shop,
COMPARE!**

Brushes
Paints
WUMBAC

Reduced
Up to **15%**

Pickett Templates
Up to **15% OFF**
complete selection



**TAKE
A
S.E.C.**

What are your alternatives?

S.E.C. (Students for Educational Clarification) an Undergraduate Student Union in the College of Education, is offering a SEARCH class that looks at alternatives in teacher preparation.

Tuesday, 7-10 p.m., 301 Condon
Upper Division Credit Available
Phone 345-1753 or 343-6681



University of Oregon
BOOKSTORE, INC.
ART DEPARTMENT

895 East 13th Ave. • Mon-Fri 8-15-5 00, Sat 9-1 00 • Phone 686-4331