

NURSE CREATES RX FOR PATIENT SAFETY



Hundreds of patents are issued to local inventors each year, the bulk of them going to folks who work in the big research labs at places like Xerox, Kodak, and the University of Rochester.

But occasionally, the weekly list of new patents includes the name of an individual inventor, somebody who's not paid to develop new products but comes up with one anyway.

One that caught my eye recently was issued to Katia Borrelli, a certified nursing assistant from Penfield who came up with the idea for her invention while working at a local nursing home.

"When I first started, I was taking care of an elderly gentleman," Borrelli said. "He was on his side and kept trying to roll over on his back. I only had two hands so I was trying to hold him in position at the same time as I was trying to care for him."

Borrelli was afraid the patient would roll out of bed and fall, or that she might injure herself by stretching and



Katia Borrelli



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straining in her efforts to keep that from happening.

"I thought, 'there's got to be something, a product I can use to hold him in that position while I do the care for him,'" Borrelli said.

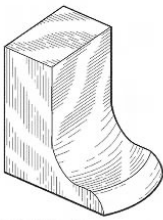
There are some foam wedges used for positioning patients, but none of them really provided the solution Borrelli was looking for.

She had the idea for how her device should work, and she started experimenting at home, using her mother as a guinea pig.

It took some experimenting, trying combinations of thickness and firmness before she came up with the final design.

The device is made out of foam. It's placed at the patient's hip, and prevents them from rolling.

"It's not complicated but it works," she said.



Katia Borrelli's invention. PROVIDED IMAGE

Borrelli has been looking for a manufacturing partner to help turn her design into a commercial product, but has struggled to find the right match.

"I had a sample made in Buffalo, but it wasn't exactly what I wanted," Borrelli said. Some of the low-cost suppli-

ers have had difficulty replicating the precise details of her design.

"It has to be made in the U.S. — that's very important to me," Borrelli added.

It's always a challenge for individual inventors to take that next step by finding the help they need to turn their ideas into a product and get that product into the hands of customers. But Borrelli's convinced that her idea is a winner.

"I'm surprised that they don't use this more in nursing homes. It's not easy holding on to a resident on their side and doing your work."

Lahman's patents column appears on Sundays. Follow him on Twitter @SeanLahman, or reach him at (585) 258-2369.



GO DEEPER ON DIGITAL

Find Sean Lahman's column online at <http://on.rocne.ws/WjpkVl>.

For a list of patents issued to local inventors, go to RocDocs.com/patents.

Catching up with Fritz Ruebeck

Supplier thriving on Internet sales

Bennett J. Loudon

Staff writer

When Fritz Ruebeck was laid off from his engineering job at ABB Inc. in 2003 he felt he had few choices.

"In order to stay in the area, I basically felt I had to start my own business. It was less scary than being laid off," said Ruebeck, of Pittsford.

The company he created, Classic Automation, buys and sells surplus industrial control parts, mainly circuit boards for companies where computers control the manufacturing process.

Ruebeck started Classic as a one-person operation in his home. After three years, he moved to a 15,000-square-foot space on Monroe Avenue and in March, Classic moved to a 11,000-square-foot building on Salt Road in Webster.

"We ran out of space for everything,"

he said. "We ran out of space to store the parts and also space for the test labs, for people to sit, to park."

In the first five years in business, the company grew to about \$4 million in annual revenues. Now Ruebeck has 25 employees and revenues are about \$7 million a year, with half of the company's business in overseas markets.

Customers find Classic online by doing an Internet search for a specific part. So, to make sure customers find the company, the company has worked hard at understanding search engine optimization.

Classic has about 75,000 parts in stock. Before anything is sold, the parts are tested and refurbished. Knowing what parts to buy, that customers might need, is a little tricky.

"That's where the special sauce or knowledge of the market really comes into play," Ruebeck said.

We met with Ruebeck recently to talk about how his business has evolved.

Our business is basically: You have a problem keeping your existing control system running and you need one or more specific parts. They say: "I need this circuit board, and I need it today. It's an emergency because my production has been shut down." If you have that need, we want to make sure that you find us.

The highest form of recycling: Is to reuse something, so that's really what we're offering people. We would basically buy the computer system that they



Fritz Ruebeck and Classic Automation have relied heavily on the Internet and search engine results to grow annual revenues to \$7 million. BENNETT LOUDON STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

don't need — the factory automation system. They get some money for that and we find someone who needs these circuit boards.

We've always really been an Internet-dependent company: One of the things that's unique about us is that

we don't have any sales force, so there's no one going out making phone calls, or knocking on doors, or anything like that. We sell only through the Internet.

It is a constant struggle: We have 12,000 different part numbers and one of our struggles is that people are bad typists. People always mess up zero and the letter "O," or "S" and a "5," and spaces are an issue, and dashes, and all sorts of things like that.

We think of ourselves: Now as a big company because we're a lot bigger than we were, even though we're small. It becomes complex, the whole processes of how you do everything. As you turn these tasks over to other people, how do you ensure that things don't fall through the cracks.

To have a good company: You have to hire good people. Managing people is not what I enjoy the most. I'd rather do stuff on the Internet, or search engine optimization, or do other things with the technology. It's very critical part to hire the right people that you can trust and let them go and do the job correctly.

It's a huge thing to move: It's a huge investment for us. And it's similar to the hiring situation. I probably waited too long to move. I knew moving tens of thousands of circuit boards, moving all the test equipment, moving all the people while trying to keep business running, would be painful.