



S A T O P

SPACE ALLIANCE TECHNOLOGY OUTREACH PROGRAM

News release

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SATOP helps lifelong dream come true for Houston inventor

BAY AREA HOUSTON, TEXAS – If you had a product that could save the food service industry one half of a billion dollars each year, you would expect restaurants all over the country to be beating a path to your door. That’s exactly what has made Juan Pacheco, 45, devote almost 10 years to his invention, the FlatwareSaver®.

In 2008, food service operations in the U.S. reported losing almost \$500 million in flatware and ramekins annually. The FlatwareSaver® is a rotating tray system that fits on top of any standard 20, 32 or 44 gallon trash container. Leftover food and trash are dumped on the tray. If anything made of metal or anything with the FlatwareSaver® sticker on it makes its way onto the tray sight unseen, an adjustable-volume alarm and LED detection indicator are set off, and they won’t stop until the item is retrieved. If nothing is detected, a quick flip of the tray empties its contents into the trash container.

Inventor seeks help from SATOP

Pacheco has worked in the food service industry in and around the Houston region for 22 years. He knows first-hand the cost of lost utensils and ramekins. His idea for the FlatwareSaver® began to take shape in 2001. Pacheco was enjoying a game of tennis when someone in the adjacent park began using a metal detector to look for lost jewelry. The beeping disturbed his game, but Pacheco said he turned a negative into a positive. That very same day, he came up with the idea of using a metal detector to find flatware that had been thrown into restaurant trash cans along with leftover food.

By October 2006, Pacheco had a professional design of his invention. However, he faced a major obstacle in finding a reliable metal detector which would easily scan the tray area as well as several inches into the debris already accumulated there. At that time, commercial, consumer, and custom-made metal detectors just didn’t fit his needs. While attending a meeting of the Houston Inventors Association, Otto Glaser, HIA vice president, advised him to get in touch with the Space Alliance Technology Outreach Program. Participants in the program are eligible to receive up to 40 hours of technical assistance at no charge to them.

Pacheco called Nick Gardner, SATOP program manager with the Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership, who suggested that he submit a Request for Technical Assistance. An engineer with one of SATOP's Alliance Partners took on the challenge of finding the best way to adapt a metal detector to the lid. The engineer also helped Pacheco to understand the dynamics behind metal detecting so that together they could develop a better product. Pacheco said, "I was really impressed with the amount of time he spent on the project." Using emails and phone calls, they discovered that the secret lay in the diameter of the copper coil which was placed under the lid. With the technical challenge solved, it was time to make a prototype.

Restaurant Innovations formed

Dean Costis and Pacheco met on a tennis court and have been friends for over 20 years. An engineer and businessman, Costis helped Pacheco with his design and business needs, and, when potential sources of financing evaporated, Pacheco suggested that they officially become partners. Costis agreed, provided the funds needed to continue, and Restaurant Innovations was born. Hilmar Lassberg, vice president of Inventor Relations at HIA, put Pacheco in touch with someone who produced three dimensional drawings of the FlatwareSaver[®] from which several prototypes were eventually made. Pacheco applied for a patent in 2007 and received it in September 2009. The patent includes metallic stickers that applied to the bottom of any item such as plastic or ceramic ramekins prevent their loss as well. The FlatwareSaver[®] devices are currently in the production stage and will be ready for delivery in mid-September.

Pacheco, as president and CEO of Restaurant Innovations, is now marketing FlatwareSaver[®] full time through direct mail, trade shows, word of mouth, and his Web site at www.flatwaresaver.com. He's also cold calling on restaurants. Pacheco said with a laugh, "When they see my brochure and product, they naturally make time for me, because we're talking about saving the restaurant money." He added that his product can save a restaurant \$2,000 to \$10,000 per year depending on the restaurant.

Hits on the FlatwareSaver[®] Web site have increased substantially, and sales are going well enough that Pacheco has placed an order for additional units. He's also looked into marketing the FlatwareSaver[®] internationally. Pacheco said, "Everything changed once SATOP helped me solve the problem I was having with the metal detector. I'm so grateful to them, the people at HIA and to Dean. This is a lifelong dream come true."

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The Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership is a member-driven organization that provides the leadership to stimulate regional economic development and employment in southeast Texas. Its members include more than 260 investor companies, business professionals, local governments, and educational institutions encompassing 13 cities, Galveston and Harris counties, and the Port of Houston Authority. Visit www.bayareahouston.com.

Space Alliance Technology Outreach Program is administered by the Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership. It is a State of Texas funded initiative designed to transfer the knowledge and technology of the U.S. Space Program to small businesses to solve technical challenges they are unable to solve themselves. Visit www.spacetechnologies.com/bahep.