



News release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For This Houston Entrepreneur, Plastic Knee Pad Caps That Were Good Just Weren't Good Enough

BAY AREA HOUSTON, TEXAS -- For the better part of two decades, Houston, Texas, entrepreneur William "Wild Bill" Walker has been working on perfecting the plastic caps that he uses for constructing knee, elbow and wrist guards. Skaters had used ramps covered with steel, wood, and masonite surfaces for years; however, several years ago, a need for tougher plastic caps was created in order to accommodate the wear and tear presented by concrete surfaces.

Walker was eight years into his venture, and plastic specialists told him that a stronger plastic could not be formed. He contacted one of his plastic suppliers, purchased a small amount of product, successfully formed the plastic caps himself, and tested them for almost three years. Walker used up a dozen pair of knee pads in the process and still had plenty of plastic remaining from the first pair made to make more. Unfortunately, he reported, "Forming this stronger plastic posed a major problem. Although it was extremely abrasive resistant, it was slow to produce and costly to form."

Over the years, Walker said that he repeatedly tried to convince manufacturers who made plastic molds to use his super core plastic. They felt that it would be very costly for the amount of work involved yielding no profit in the end. Not one to give up, Walker renewed his goal of making high performance plastic caps a few years ago.

Through the suggestion of one of his plastics manufacturers, he made contact with a new plastic company that, according to Walker, guaranteed him "they had the cure." After having a mold made and getting samples, he discovered that the company had only dealt with the snow industry and had no knowledge of applying the product on dry surfaces such as concrete. Walker had reached another dead end, but he still wouldn't give up.

Then a new opportunity presented itself through a casual conversation with a friend, Hilmar Lassberg, who knew about the Space Alliance Technology Outreach Program (SATOP) program. Lassberg is vice president of Inventor Relations with the Houston Inventors

Association. When Walker learned that the technical assistance he needed could be provided at no cost to him, he contacted Wesley Forbes, SATOP Texas project engineer with the Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership, who connected him with SATOP Alliance Partner Paul Ledoux in Houston, Texas. Walker and Ledoux discussed in great detail the issues he was having. Walker stated, "Paul knew exactly who I needed to speak to. I followed up, obtained some samples and suggestions, and passed the samples and suggestions on to all three of my plastic formers. Paul actually called at least one or more of them. When that happened, the wheels started rolling again."

Ledoux related, "I enjoyed working with 'Wild Bill' Walker. His enthusiasm for his product and wanting to make it the 'best' possible was refreshing. I talked to Bill about the problems he was having with his then current product. I made a small literature search, talked to some plastic manufacturers and the molder. We came up with a formulation that met Bill's requirement."

One of the plastic manufacturers obtained a sample of a higher grade plastic material, which made a huge improvement on the quality of plastic Walker needed. A third plastic former with whom Ledoux spoke used Ledoux's suggestions. The plastic testing that has followed is producing great results according to Walker. He concluded saying, "The caps on my company's knee, elbow, and wrist guards will be able to handle the toughest surfaces now. I can tell you for an absolute fact that if it were not for Hilmar Lassberg, Paul Ledoux, and all the people I have been working with through SATOP, I would have never been able to reach the goal that I have been working on for so many years."

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Skater Dan Macfarlane photographed by Randy Bradley

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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 aerospace, petrochemical, and healthcare companies, developers, bankers and real estate brokers, 13 cities and Galveston and Harris counties. Visit www.bayareahouston.com.

Space Alliance Technology Outreach Program is funded by the State of Texas and NASA. The program provides technical assistance to small businesses to solve technical challenges they are unable to solve themselves. Visit www.spacetechsolutions.com