

THE SUN, LOWELL, MASSACHUSETTS

SUCCESS IS IN THE BAG(GLER)

Former Lowell man's invention is a hit with grocery and convenience stores

By Marie Donovan
Sun Correspondent

Many people make New Year's resolutions involving something along the lines of getting rich or skinny — or rich *and* skinny, for the particularly ambitious.

But on New Year's Eve 2005, one-time Lowell resident Mark Eichenbaum made a different sort of resolution. You could say he vowed to become the Bagglmeister.

Four days into the New Year, Eichenbaum, who now lives in Augusta, Maine, took drawings of his proposed groceries-carrying invention, which he called The Baggl, to the University of Maine art department for fine tuning.

Then the drawings went to a Maine woodcarver, and Eichenbaum went to a patent attorney. He had technical drawings made of the wood carving and, armed with \$35,000 in seed capital, contracted a local machinery company to use them as a model for mass producing.

The end result was The Baggl, a latex-free, handheld device with three hooks and a soft thermal rubber grip.

Eichenbaum, 49, a former car salesman and convenience store manager who lived in Lowell during the 1970s and '80s, was inspired to design The Baggl after watching his grandmother and other shoppers, particularly older

"The bags cut off their circulation."

Mark Eichenbaum, explaining how he invented The Baggl to help people carry grocery bags.

people, struggle with grocery bags.

"The bags cut off their circulation," he said. After several months in production, design tweaking and market test research (98 percent of respondents found the device "very" or "somewhat" easy to use), The Baggl went on sale in late September over the Internet at www.thebaggl.com for \$4.49.

Within weeks, Eichenbaum was getting orders from around the country; to date, he's sold more than 2,500 Bagglers to people in all 50 states and six foreign countries.

"Sales are really taking off now," said company President George Silvar, a Lowell resident and Eichenbaum's son-in-law.

Silvar said 158 Hannaford grocery stores in New York and New England are among 1,200-plus retail locations across North America that carry The Baggl now, including grocery and pharmacy chains in Washington and Florida. Eichenbaum has even hired sales representatives in North Carolina, Georgia and Arkansas and is planning to expand in Europe, Israel, China, New Zealand and Australia.

Eichenbaum said he has received letters from customers all over the country thanking him for making their grocery, mall and hardware shopping trips easier. Even his local U.S. congressman wrote to thank him for serving the needs of older shoppers,



George Silvar, left, and his wife Julie, both of Lowell, with their children, Alexis, 9, and Geanna, 4, show off The Baggl inside their kitchen. The Baggl, a device used to secure plastic grocery bags, was invented by Julie's father, Mark Eichenbaum, of Maine. Silvar is president of the company, which has successfully sold the product to Hannaford Supermarkets and several convenience-store chains.

SUN PHOTOS/HOWARD MARTIN

ceries-carrying device doesn't have any particular inspiration; it just came to him.

The device will likely be particularly popular in urban environments, where smaller stores may not have enough high school sophomores to help customers with bagging.

At \$4.49, The Baggl is one of three handheld groceries-carrying devices currently on the market. But in addition to being lower priced than the EZ Carry or One Trip Grip, its ergonomic, soft grip and three plastic tines allow for easy securing and removal of bag handles. Each hook can hold up to 18 pounds and the three hooks together can support more than 50 pounds, plus as many as six bags on each handle.

"These three hooks actually displace the weight more evenly," Eichenbaum said.

At just 1.7 ounces and 5 inches by 4.5 inches with a 7/8-inch grip, The Baggl is small enough to fit in a pocket, purse or vehicle console. Consumers can even clip it onto belt loops.



The Baggl can be found at Hannaford