

The Bagglers makes it easier to use plastic shopping bags

BY JOHN HALE

AUGUSTA — Ever since grocery stores switched over from paper bags to almost exclusive use of plastic bags, shoppers have had some complaints.

Finding the handles on multiple plastic bags so you can slip your fingers through them is an annoyance. The handles can cut into your hands painfully if you've got a heavy load. And the open plastic bags can dump their contents into the back of your vehicle if you come to a sudden stop, making for another annoyance in picking up individual cans and bottles and stuffing them back into their bags at home.

Mark Eichenbaum, thought there had to be a better way. About five years ago, the Augusta man was helping his mother with her groceries every week and he noticed the various drawbacks of carrying several plastic bags at a time full of goods into the house. Later, after his mother passed away, he helped his grandmother with her groceries.

So the 49-year-old man decided he'd come up with a solution.

Eichenbaum's answer? The Bagglers — a neat, pocket-sized invention that solves many of the problems associated with carrying plastic bags full of groceries.

"The Bagglers is an incredible tool that makes carrying plastic shopping bags easier," said Eichenbaum, who has been a salesman at Blouin Motors in Augusta for 16 years.

"Using The Bagglers eliminates all the awkwardness, hassle and pain that come with plastic shopping bags. The Bagglers really helps people carry and manage all these flimsy plastic bags that you encounter every day of your life."

The Bagglers' handle is made of soft rubber that is easy on the hands. The base is made of hard polypropylene plastic that has three hooks for carrying up to two plastic bags each. Each hook can carry up to 18 pounds so The Bagglers is capable of holding a maximum weight slightly greater

than 50 pounds. The hooks are designed with smooth, thin plastic tines that allow bag handles to easily slide on and off the hooks. Once the bags are on the hooks, they won't come off.

Eichenbaum began planning for The Bagglers Co. in earnest about a year ago. About a month ago, he had sold about 1,200 Bagglers, mostly over the Internet. But in the last month alone, he has sold another 5,000 Bagglers.

And he has gained sales agreements with a couple of big distributors — Pine State Vending Co., the largest servicer of convenience stores in Maine; and Associated Grocers of Maine. Each of those two companies took 50 cases of Bagglers, or 2,400 of the devices to start.

"Things have mushroomed in a very short time," Eichenbaum said. "The Bagglers is really cool!"

It is impossible for Eichenbaum to hide his enthusiasm about his invention, which comes in four different color schemes.

He described the process that went into starting up his company.

First he made a drawing of what he wanted. On Jan. 4, 2006, he took the drawing to Robert Katz, an art professor at the University of Maine at Augusta, who passed it along to another UMA professor, Richard Frino. Frino refined the drawing. Then it



Mark Eichenbaum, of Augusta, demonstrates his new invention, The Bagglers, by using two of them to lift some heavy loads of groceries at his home on Glenwood Avenue. The Bagglers allows a person to carry more groceries at a time than they would by hand. JOHN HALE

Dana law firm for a patent search and a patent application. Within two days, Verrill, Dana had all the details of all the other bag-carrying inventions.

I could see that mine was nothing like them."

Eichenbaum also had a three-dimensional drawing of The Bagglers created by a student at Capital Area Technical Center.

Eichenbaum went to the Maine Technology Institute in Gardiner where he was referred to an engineer in Springvale named Gary Gagnon, whose company is G & G Machinery.

"I wanted to have this made in Maine. I think it's a nice idea. I live here," he said.

He said he also received help in his house.

"We finalized the design at the end of April," he said. "We made prototypes in May. We did market testing in July and August. And we started selling it on line at the end of September. Within two weeks, we had an order from Spokane, Wash. I started getting orders from all over."

In early November, Eichenbaum put an ad on the Internet for sales representatives for The Bagglers to be paid on commission east of the Mississippi River. He got 60 responses and hired three salesmen in North Carolina, Georgia and Arkansas, after personally visiting each one of them.

his startup by Jim Burbank of the Service Corps of Retired Executives.

"I wanted it to be made of a plastic as hard as a coat hanger. I wanted the handle to be soft on the hands," Eichenbaum said. "I looked at what everybody had and said, 'It's really inferior.' Mine was substantially different."

Eichenbaum said he wanted something that was smooth, seamless and would fit into a person's pocket.

Eichenbaum hired Gary Gagnon to manufacture The Bagglers.

"We talked about what would be the ideal plastic," he said. "We settled on a two-step injection-molded piece with a soft rubber handle and a polypropylene base. By now it was March 2006."

Eichenbaum said Gagnon's company makes the product and ships large orders. Eichenbaum ships individual mail orders from

In the future, he said, "We can customize The Bagglers for a little bit of money. We can put a school's name on it or a company name on it and they can give them away as a promotion."

The Bagglers sells for \$4.49 each, plus shipping.

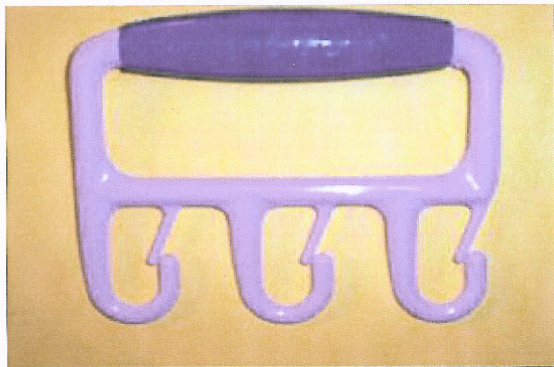
Currently, Eichenbaum is trying to get several big-box stores to carry the product.

He knows a man in Arkansas who is trying to get Wal-Mart to carry The Bagglers.

"If we get it into Wal-Mart, that could mean 5 million Bagglers a year," he exclaimed.

Robert Lawson, of R.J.L. Marketing in Camden, is also working to get several major stores to carry The Bagglers.

"Using The Bagglers eliminates all the awkwardness, hassle and pain that come with plastic shopping bags. — Mark Eichenbaum



A close-up shot of The Bagglers shows its soft rubber handle and its three solid hooks for carrying plastic bags. The thin plastic tines allow the bag handles to slide on and off the hooks easily and keep the bags closed and in place while traveling in a car. PHOTO COURTESY OF MARK EICHENBAUM