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What does the USPTO do
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The Spiral Eye Needle

Pam Turner Reinvented the Sewing Needle



For over 50 years, the Minnesota Inventors Congress has had an inventors expo in Redwood Falls, Minn. I have been fortunate to have been able to represent the USPTO at this event many times. The expo is a great opportunity for inventors to display their inventions, meet other inventors, learn more about the patent and trademark system and get acquainted with how to get their ideas to market. The expo has been a labor of love for the many volunteers in Redwood Falls for many years, and it is one of the events I look forward to attending whenever I can.

The reason I bring the expo up is because it is where I met an inventor a couple years ago that had a simple, yet unique invention. The invention is called the "Spiral Eye Needle," invented by Pam Turner of Minnesota. As I was walking around the expo exhibit space, I noticed a crowd around one of the booths. I passed it by and returned later to another crowd. I



was finally able to see why the crowd was there. Pam was demonstrating and selling her needles as fast as she was showing them. So, I wondered what was so great about this needle that she had. Well, if you are like me

—getting older and losing the ability to see and do the simplest of tasks with your fingers—then her invention is just for you. I have always had a hard time threading a needle. My hands are rather large and my hand-eye coordination is bad when it comes to putting a thread into a tiny slot in a needle. The Spiral Eye Needle solves that problem. Pam has invented a new design for the eye of the needle, allowing the user to simply slide a looped thread down the needle toward the eye, and the needle basically threads itself. Even I can do it. Why did she invent this simple, yet fascinating invention?

This is what Pam said.

I remember laughing as my mom struggled to thread a needle. Glasses resting on her nose, she trimmed the end of the thread, sucked on it, failed to get it through the eye of the needle and re-trimmed it. Sometimes she would curse, "Why can't someone invent a better needle? We've been to the moon for goodness sake."

Eventually, she would break down and ask one of us kids to thread it for her.

Then, just a few years ago, I realized it was me that couldn't get a limp piece of thread through a hole I couldn't see. And it wasn't so funny. My mom died in 1976, but I could hear her laughter as I struggled to get that needle threaded. Surely someone had invented a better needle by now.

So, I went shopping for one. I found an open-eye needle called the calyx needle. It has an opening at the top. It was easy to thread, but the thread came out every time I used it. I tossed the needle in the trash. Obviously no one was ever going to invent a better needle.

Forty years is long enough to wait for someone else to do something. I decided it was up to me. So I did it. I did it for Mom.

I can tell you Pam's invention was a hit at the expo and still is. It has received rave reviews from sellers and consumers alike. She has appeared on TV talking about her invention. She is now working on using her new technology for medical needles as well as for sewing needles. Who knows where you might run into one of her needles. What is really nice is that Pam is making her needles in the USA and creating jobs here. She is currently the only manufacturer of needles in America. With millions of needles sold every year in the USA alone, it would be nice if we could overcome the deficit of needles sold coming from China. A large majority of needles sold in the US are imported from China.

Inventions don't need to be big or complicated to be a real breakthrough, and Pam's Spiral Eye Needle has shown us that. I encourage each of you to solve that problem that has been nagging you, just like Pam did.

Who knows: you might be featured here in the future.

By John Calvert : Administrator, USPTO Inventors Assistance Program



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