

ProBoPat Success Story | Bryan's Story

As a Facilities Supervisor at Fort Lewis College, Bryan Laurel knew there had to be an easier and more efficient way to clean. After searching through custodial catalogs in vain, he fashioned his own cleaning tool from plumbing parts and other janitorial equipment components.

Bryan's invention simultaneously applies soap, scrubs, and rinses - and its long telescoping shaft eases back strain.

He made four of these cleaning tools - since dubbed the Tsunami Sea Lion - which his janitorial team tested and used throughout the school year. Bryan refined the cleaning tool with his team's feedback, including the ability to switch out different types of sponges.

Bryan began thinking about more uses for his invention - including car washing and household cleaning - and patenting his invention.



That's when he began to hit some brick walls.

"The quotes I received to complete the patent process started at \$10,000, which made patenting my invention seem out of reach and hopeless," Bryan said.

Bryan decided that if he couldn't afford to hire a patent lawyer, he would patent his invention himself.

He laughs now at the idea saying, "I'm so glad I didn't write the patent myself, it would have been a disaster and I probably would not have been patented."

The legal process to obtain a full patent typically requires three to five years and thousands of dollars in fees.

"Patent filing services just aren't accessible to average, everyday people like me," Bryan said. "Especially considering patent filing is a huge risk and you might end up with nothing at the end of the process."

Bryan learned of the ProBoPat program - which connects low-income entrepreneurs with volunteer patent professionals who provide legal services on a pro bono basis - via the United States Patent and Trademark Office website.

"Obtaining a patent is a very long, expensive, and technical process," said Jennifer Rothschild, ProBoPat Administrator. "Patent professionals provide the guidance and expertise needed to successfully navigate this complicated procedure."

ProBoPat paired Bryan with volunteer lawyer Torrey Spink of Kilpatrick Townsend, who initiated a patent search to ensure Bryan's invention was not already patented. When the search came back clean, the patent writing and filing process began.

“It was a really cool experience to see the patent process unfold,” Bryan said. “Torrey was extremely helpful and patient every step of the way. Realizing that I was not familiar with the process, he explained everything to me in a way that I could understand,” Bryan said.

Initially the patent office returned with objections.

“The lawyers at Kilpatrick Townsend helped me revise my patent so that it was accepted,” Bryan said. “I always felt like Torrey and Kilpatrick Townsend had my best interest in mind and that they went by the book. I was really happy with how the patent turned out.”

Without the ProBoPat program, filing his patent would have cost Bryan between \$14,000 and \$20,000.

“Patent law is very nuanced and acquiring a patent can be very cost prohibitive,” Torrey said. So many great ideas have come from people who work from home or start a business in their garage, and it can be quite difficult for these people to gain protection for their inventions.”

Sometimes a patent is vital to business success.

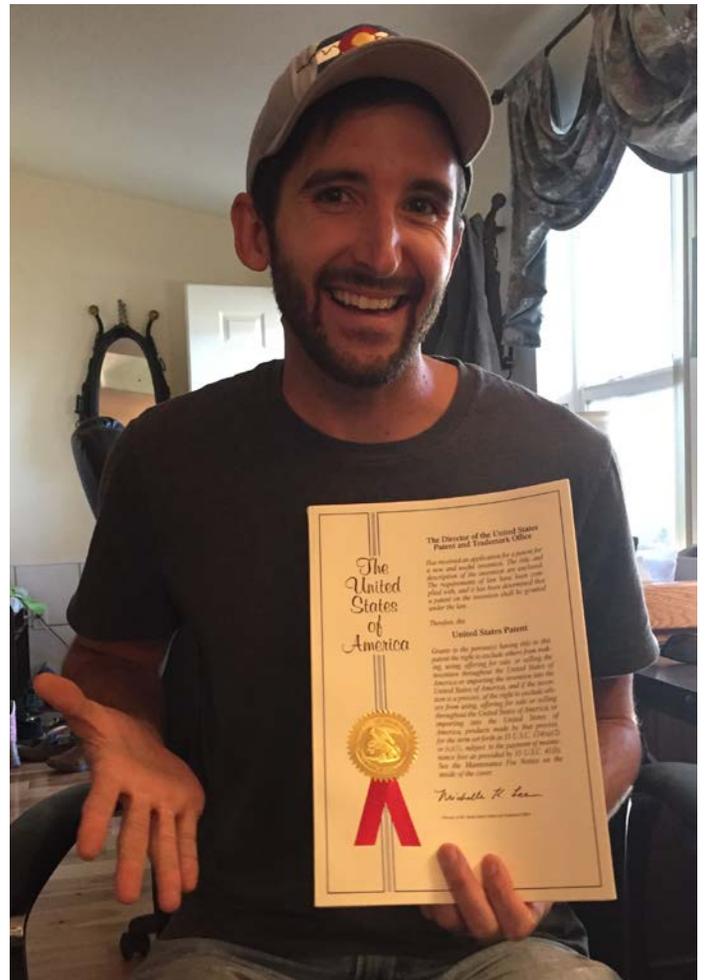
“Gaining a patent is often an important step in protecting your intellectual property and the acquisition of a patent may help increase the value of your business to potential purchasers or investors,” Torrey said.

Bryan paid to expedite the patent process - so he could begin manufacturing the Tsunami Sea Lion more quickly - and received his patent nine months after it was filed.

“Receiving my patent in the mail made it real for me,” Bryan said. “It was affirming and inspiring to receive that huge envelop with an official gold seal.”

Jennifer connected Bryan to Billet Brothers Engineering to further refine his prototype and begin getting quotes from manufacturers.

Today the Tsunami Sea Lion features an ergonomic and ambidextrous handle with mess-free soap and water controls. It’s liquid conducting universal joint allows the shaft and cleaning element to pivot freely in any direction, without interrupting water flow.





“Success means having the Tsunami Sea Lion available for all cleaning and sanitation professionals across America as well as for DIY car washers. And also having my invention have awareness as an all-purpose cleaning tool,” Bryan said.

“I would love for the Tsunami Sea Lion to be on the big box store shelves one day. This tool is hands down the easiest way to clean, I know it’s just a matter of getting it in front of people.”

Bryan’s full-time focus is getting his invention manufactured.

“I can’t imagine where I’d be right now without the ProBoPat program,” Bryan said. “I don’t think I

would still be on this road of realizing my invention, the financial barriers would have stopped me.”

“What the ProBoPat program has done for me is tremendous.”