



TENNESSEE INVENTORS ASSOCIATION

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February 13, 2004

MEETING HIGHLIGHTS--JANUARY 17, 2004

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CONDENSED CALL FOR FULL VERSION

The January meeting, being very well attended started with introductions of numerous visitors. Our newly elected President, Igor Alexeff presided and followed up by presenting our speaker, Ralph Davis of Jellico, Tennessee.

Inventor Ralph Davis shows handy tool

Did you ever try to layout a set of stairs steps? No easy job, right?

Ralph Davis must have figured that out himself. Knowing of a problem, beings a reason to innovate, so he went to work to simplify the situation. That of course led to his invention. The “**STAIR SQUARE**”.

His device turned out to be a template to provide the proper dimensions and angles necessary to build and install a set of steps that would more likely meet building and safety codes. Further details can be found by searching out Ralph’s patent, D472, 825. Several variations evolved, mold manufacturers were sought and finally in keeping with the inventor’s patriotic stand were produced in the United States.

That being said it is useful to look back at Ralph’s background and philosophy. Ralph Davis was the son of a coal miner, the fifth child of thirteen and was brought up in the heart of the southeast’s coal mining community. He is a firm believer in the golden rule and his business ethic demands that his handshake is a contract.

During his presentation we learned that his inventions (seventeen) stemmed from the need to perfect or improve some phase of his work. He is a licensed contractor in the state of Tennessee and found it necessary to sometimes “invent or improvise” to carry on his job.

His activity came at a cost however. He learned that designing, re-designing plus attorney fees were necessary functions-- all of which required considerable financing. By all accounts it would appear that from start to finish some twenty thousand dollars went into his project including the molds necessary to supply a finished product.

His marketing efforts included participating in home and trade shows. Numerous outlets were ultimately established and he utilized magazine advertising and enjoyed the benefits of some free “ink” in local newspapers.

Ralph told of being a firm believer in the age-old dependence on word of mouth. He emphasized that if he had a good product; stood behind it you would tell someone else. In turn that might be repeated time and time again making it possible to have a continuing market for his useful tool.

Davis and his partner, Tennessee Mould recognize the need to maintain a modest profit margin and normally expect a ten percent return. They are now capable of manufacturing several thousand plastic Stair Step templates per day. They claim the time and effort involved in getting to the current point in their business is the result of following a seven step program and blending a lot of patients, time and trust.

CAN IT GET ANY BETTER?

A break following the interesting presentation blended into a warm gathering that resulted in a fun networking session with attendees getting to know each other and exchanging ideas and experiences.

**Sharing ideas is no crime and usually no danger. Groups such as ours provide a sounding board and surely a means to exchange information often useful to others.
IT'S WHAT TIA IS ALL ABOUT**

As mentioned earlier, this months meeting was well attended. We have the pleasure of introducing new members, Albert and Nancy Hall of Johnson City and Ryan Black who resides in Powell. In addition we are happy to greet Lee Nix from Oak Ridge as well as Joe Angelini, also of Oak Ridge. And last but not least we enjoyed having Joseph (Ray) Drewery join our group. He lives in Oliver Springs.

NEXT MEETING FEBRUARY 21

Speaking in February will be patent attorney Michael McKee. His subject will be about design patents. Certainly the views of this artist whose paintings are being sold at art shows will put a spin on design patents we may be missing. It is suspected that a comparison of art versus engineering (when it comes to design patents) might be revealed.

Ed. note: This might be a good time to review your understanding of design patents. If you do not have a copy of the patent office handbook "A GUIDE TO FILING A DESIGN PATENT APPLICATION" you will find the full text on the PTO web site. Go to their home page and locate "free patent guides and manuals" in that page area you will find the handbook referred to. A printed copy will be on display at the February meeting.

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