

Local inventor's Leaf-Factor is catching on

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good reviews at the Canada Blooms fair, earning featured status in its new Green Products section.

"I'm a gadget guy myself, always looking at the latest things like leaf-blowers or whatever. How many tools are out there that actually pay for themselves?" he wondered.

"I was surprised that someone else wasn't making something like it, so that's why I took it right away to a lawyer to get a patent for Canada and the U.S.A."

He was able to get the Leaf-Factor on the shelves of some small garden outlets around the GTA in hopes of taking it nationally. And while everyone seemed to like the product, getting it through the doors of retail giants such as Canadian Tire or Wal-mart requires some help.

"I was trying to get it into the big box stores and meet with their buyers, but it's so difficult because they only buy from a distributor," said de Leon, who also received plenty of positive feedback from appearances with the Leaf-Factor on the *Marilyn Dennis Show* and a news feature

by CTV's Pat Foran.

"You e-mail the buyers and make calls and most of them wouldn't even return them. If you're just an independent, you're on your own. Then I actually got lucky."

A Mississauga-based distribution company called Parkline Products was interested in the Leaf-Factor and one of its representatives showed the product to a buyer at Home Hardware's head office in St. Jacob's, Ont., who was so impressed that he immediately bought up the remaining inventory (1,700 of the initial 2,000 units). It's now for sale in Home Hardware stores across Canada for a sale price of \$19.99.

The parts for the Leaf-Factor are manufactured in China and assembled here, although for the next shipping container full of about 9,000 units due to arrive in the spring, de Leon is already thinking of ways to slim down the packaging size to cut costs.

"You hear from people that the product is so good that it will sell itself, and then you start to see all of these expenses that come with it and you say, 'Uh oh,'" laughed de Leon.

"I'm a graphic designer so I

basically did all of the marketing myself to save costs. Even consultants want big money and there's no guarantee of a distributor or buyer. The power of the Internet is just incredible; there's so much info there that you can do all the research yourself with just a little elbow grease. If I wasn't that aggressive, I probably wouldn't have sold it to anyone. It's a great feeling to see the product actually moving."

de Leon said he's considered taking his product to the popular CBC-TV series *The Dragons' Den* to see if he can land some financing and get connected to a larger distribution network, but isn't sold on what the show can do for him.

"So many people have asked me that and I'm always tempted to try it," he added.

"(But) I've heard from other people who went on the show and got a deal from the Dragons and they said it took a couple of years until something actually happened with all of the legal things that are involved. I need to move this product quick and get it out to the stores. (The Dragons) turned down the Omega Tree Stand lady and she's made a fortune."



It's beginning to look a lot like...

The work has begun For the Light Up the Hills celebration as volunteer Paul Yates fed the untangled strings of lights to Dan Dayment, perched high in the bucket, at The Old Seed House Garden last week. Ignition night is Dec. 1. Photo by Ted Brown

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