

Invention could save a life

By BRUCE STAPLEY
When John Wolff read how two recent Stouffville area house fires had been the result of homeowners forgetting to turn off their stove elements, it gave him a renewed belief in his latest project.

Wolff, who lives in Glasgow, just southeast of Stouffville, has recently developed the prototype for a device that will make it impossible for people to leave their stove on.

Designed specifically for seniors, Wolff says there are many people out there who will be able to take advantage of his device.

"I asked Stouffville Fire Chief Bill Brown after the Stouffville area fires the other week if there was something that happens often (fire caused by leaving stoves on), and he said it was," says Wolff.

Wolff's device consists of a timer box and a bypass box. The user simply plugs his stove into the bypass box, and then inserts the plug from the bypass box into the stove outlet on the wall.

The timer box is then set for the amount of time the user wants the cycle to run for. When the stove is to be used, the user presses a button which activates the cycle.

A buzzer sounds, for the benefit of the blind, and to inform the user the cycle has started. The user then turns on the burner of his choice, or the oven.

A minute before the cycle ends, the buzzer sounds again. At that time, the user can reset the timer box, allowing the stove to run through another time cycle, or simply allow the stove to shut off completely.

"It is essentially a failsafe stove timer," says Wolff, an independent researcher and developer. "And it goes well beyond what a fire detector does. Fire detectors can't prevent fires, and they sometimes go off accidentally. And they are no good once a person has left the house as far as preventing a fire from spreading."

The idea came about as a result of Wolff's being approached by the Ontario Government's Ministry of Community and Social Services.

Since last year, he has been involved in Support for Indepen-



Photo: JIM THOMAS

dent Living for Seniors (SILS), an organization involved in researching and developing technical adaptations for seniors.

Government officials asked Wolff to come up with a device that would automatically turn off a stove. "They wanted it to be failsafe, and they wanted it so you couldn't bypass it, or jam the buttons."

Wolff hopes his prototype, which is in use in a senior's apartment in Stratford, will become standard equipment in all new seniors buildings, as well as in homes built for the handicapped.

And he admits his investment is substantial. But he says the potential is there for his device to be used in conjunction with appliances other than stoves.

"This is only the beginning. You could eventually adapt the unit to any electrical device in the house that could be potentially dangerous, such as a heater," he said. "It could even be used for lamps, if need be."

Government officials have been monitoring the unit that is in operation in the Stratford apartment. "They've told me its working well, that the user, an 87-year-old man, has reported that he now has a degree of comfort and confidence he didn't have before," he added.

Already, he has been approached by agencies that deal with seniors and the handicapped. "The people from Veteran Af-

fairs and various occupational therapists have expressed interest," says Wolff. "There really isn't anything like it on the market."

He feels that once the unit has become widely accepted, it could be built right into the wiring systems of seniors' buildings and other housing types.

He says that up until now, there has been no incentive for stove manufacturers to come up with such a feature for their products — and he hopes it stays that way, until he establishes his own market.

Wolff's business background is in the area of management consulting. He has a masters degree in management science, and has done considerable work in the patent field. He has helped many entrepreneurs start up technologically-based businesses.

His SILS organization is currently set up at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute in Toronto, where he has access to several experts in the field of gerontology.

Ryerson has also provided funding for the outfit, which is dedicated to learning what types of devices and adaptations are needed by seniors in order for them to be able to live independently.

"Up to now, there hasn't been enough market demand for such devices, so these technologies have not been taken up by major

manufacturers," he said.

The whole idea, he states, is to create facilities that don't resemble rehabilitation devices, which tend to give the impression of illness. His research has found that healthy seniors can't accept such a connotation.

Wolff is currently seeking investors for his stove timer unit, and will be soon setting up facilities for manufacturing the product somewhere in the Stouffville-Markham area.

Stouffville researcher John Wolff is working on a device that would automatically shut off a stove's flame if the user accidentally left on the device by being distracted by a combination with Support for Independent Living for Seniors group that researches similar concerns. A prototype is currently in use at a senior's home in Stratford, Ont., and Wolff says the results are encouraging.

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2. Steel Pac at \$74.95 with Steel Toe should read "Sale Pac \$79.95 with Steel Toe and Steel Plate."
3. Quilted Flannel Shirt at \$19.99 is not available in "Buffalo Check."
4. Stanfield's heavy duty underwear is available "At or through" Mark's Work Wearhouse stores.
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