

# MEASURED EFFORT

A 10-YEAR EFFORT GETS THE SCOOP

BY BILL FALLON

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After a July 16, 2003 workout, Easton resident Drew Pickering Jr. sought a rejuvenating drink only to end up covered in supplement powder.

"The stuff was everywhere," he said. "There had to be a better way."

That was Pickering's Thomas Edison moment. That night he sketched out the basics in a notebook of what for him would become a 10-year sojourn to patent and bring to market his Scoop E-Z, now officially patent No. 7,441,676 – Device for Dispensing Media.

For those with similar lightbulb moments, ads abound featuring companies that promise (sort of) to make your invention a success: You could invent the next paper clip.

The reality for Pickering and his company, Kenz Inc. in Easton, was riddled with potholes, production dead ends (caveat emptor, especially in China) and the absolute requirement that the idea possess "uniqueness," as Pickering explained on a recent sun-splashed day in his home-office in a renovated horse barn. Additionally, you have to be aware of obviousness. "They don't allow you to patent the obvious, such as changing a color to achieve a patent or putting square edges on something with round edges.

"I always thought inventing was the hard part," he said, offering something of a tinkerer's lament. "With this process, you hear 'no' a lot."

Pickering possessed a single large advantage over the person who thinks up a great idea, but who has little ability to manufacture and see it through to fruition. He and his father, Drew Pickering Sr., ran for 25 years Kingswood Technology in Stratford, a tap-and-die shop. "That's where I learned how to make a product," Pickering Jr., 41, said. The shop made medical devices and car parts, including the levers for tilt steering wheels. Pickering Jr. worked on the manufacturing



Drew Pickering Jr. with his patented scoop in Easton.

Photo by Bill Fallon

bench for seven years, four of them as an apprentice, before Pickering Sr. would let him talk to a customer.

Pickering's scoops possess windowed and curved handles to allow excess powder to fall back into its container. The scoops also have fluted necks, which make it easy to pour powders into, for example, a quart bottle of water. Taken as a single product, the scoops' patent journey cost about \$40,000 and included provisional, utility and patent treaty cooperation phases.

Like many manufacturers, Pickering sought to manufacture in China. The low startup cost was the musk that first attracted him. Six months later came the comeuppance. "The tooling is cheaper there," he said. "After that you get much better manufacturing quality control in the U.S. This is one reason U.S.-manufactured stuff is coming back.

"I have much better quality control in the U.S.," he said, praising his current manufacturer, Minnesota-based National Measures. "Overseas, you don't know what you're going to get until six months later. You open the door and this is not what you wanted or half are bad. I had huge lag times – months later I still would not know what I had."

After a year manufacturing in China, Pickering brought his product to National

Measures, which, he acknowledged, takes its share in a deal he termed "equitable." He said he had just contracted to produce 2.5 million scoops for a company whose name he declined to mention. Companies already on board include GNC, which operates 7,500 nutrition-themed stores, Vitamin World and Amazon.

Besides his three sizes of Scoop E-Z – a teaspoon (15 c.c.), a tablespoon (30 c.c.) and a 20-c.c. model – Pickering is a principal in Molto Bene, an Italian restaurant/caterer in Ansonia that features a 100-seat restaurant, 250-seat patio and 300-seat banquet hall.

Pickering offered the John Donne poetical sentiment "No man is an island" in citing those who had helped him: his sister Nicole Fitzgerald, principal in Oxford-based I-Design, designed all the packaging. Yale engineering lecturer Henry Bolanos helped with product development and, in turn, Pickering is helping two of his students, pro bono, launch their products. His father Drew Pickering Sr., he said, ensured, "I knew exactly how to make each part I was looking at." He also credited associates Dana Cotes, who helped with product design, and Joe Keenan – "He could sell ice to the Eskimos" – on the sales side.

The website is [scoop-ez.com](http://scoop-ez.com).