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SPORTS, C1



Cold start to track season

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The Register-Guard

EUGENE, OREGON

MONDAY, MARCH 19, 2012

75 CENTS

CREATING A STIR

A Eugene couple invents mugs and glasses that mix contents



KEVIN CLARK/The Register-Guard

Bill Poppie and his wife, **Gretchen Poppie**, started a business called **InStirring**, which intends to market mugs and glasses that are "self stirring," and now they're working on generating financing through the **Kickstarter.com** commerce website.

BY **ILENE ALESHIRE**
The Register-Guard

Bill Poppie's idea for a "self stirring" line of drinkware wasn't exactly an overnight revelation. The array of ceramic cups and glasses — and one paper prototype — lined up on a tabletop at the Poppie Design firm on Blair Boulevard is recent. But the idea for them had been germinating for 25 years.

It started with Poppie's call to jury duty back in the 1980s. He had gone to the break room at the Lane County Courthouse during a recess, poured himself a cup of coffee and dumped in some powdered creamer, then noticed that there were no spoons or stir-sticks in the room.

Some people gave up on cream and sugar and just drank their coffee black, he said. Others resorted to stirring their coffee with their fingers, pens or what-

Turn to **GLASSES**, Page A5

More on the Web about InStirring at rgne.ws/instirring

View a video with this story at registerguard.com



InStirring glasses are made with curved sides that stir the drinks when the glass is turned — good for coffee and mixed drinks.

Like a project? You can kick in some cash to help

Kickstarter.com calls itself a "new form of commerce and patronage." It's part of the relatively recent phenomenon of "crowd financing" — raising money by seeking individually small sums from large numbers of people, generally strangers.

But it differs from most other crowd financing efforts in a couple of key ways. The four-year-old website focuses strictly on creative projects, for starters. These can be in a wide range of areas, including music, film, technology, food and design.

Second, people who seek funding on the site are not seeking investors, which would mean selling a share in their company or project, nor are they seeking a loan.

Instead, people who support a particular project on Kickstarter pledge

Turn to **KICKSTARTER**, Page A5

Grad rates show gains

Oregon sports a moderate rise in the number of students staying in high school

BY **KIMBERLY HEFLING**
The Associated Press

HAGERSTOWN, Md. — The last straw for 17-year-old Alton Burke was a note left on his door. The high school dropout picked up the phone and re-enrolled at South Hagerstown High.

Burke missed about 200 days of class, but Heather Dixon, the student intervention specialist who left the note, never gave up on him.

Aggressive efforts to prevent students such as Burke from dropping out contributed to a modest 3.5 percent increase nationally in the high school graduation rate from 2001 to 2009, according to research to be presented today at the Grad Nation summit in Washington. The event was organized by the children's advocacy group America's Promise Alliance, founded by former Secretary of State Colin Powell.

The graduation rate was 75 percent in 2009, meaning that 1 in 4 students fails to get a diploma in four years, researchers found. That's well below the organization's goal of 90 percent by 2020.

Researchers found that the number of "dropout factories," schools that fail to graduate more than 60 percent of students on time, had dropped by more than 450 between 2002 and 2010, but that 1,550 remain.

"Big gains are possible if you work hard at it, and if you don't focus on it, you're going to go backward," said Robert Balfanz, a report author and director of the Everyone Graduates Center at the School of Education at Johns Hopkins University.

The increase in graduation rates was primarily because of growth in 12 states, with New York and Tennessee showing double digit gains since 2002, according to the research. At the other

Turn to **RATES**, Page A4

Four GOP-appointed justices control health law's fate

BY **MARK SHERMAN**
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Here's a thought that can't comfort President Obama: The fate of his health care overhaul rests with four Republican-appointed Supreme Court justices.

His most sweeping domestic achievement could be struck down if they stand together with Justice Clarence Thomas, another GOP appointee who is the likeliest vote against.

But the good news for Obama is that he probably needs only one of the four to side with

him to win approval of the law's crucial centerpiece, the requirement that almost everyone in this country has insurance or pays a penalty.

Lawyers with opposing views of the issue uniformly agree that the four Democratic-appointed justices, including Obama's two

picks, Elena Kagan and Sonia Sotomayor, will have no trouble concluding that Congress did not overstep its authority in adopting the insurance requirement that is aimed at sharply reducing the now 50 million people without insurance.

On the other side, Thomas

has made clear in several cases that he does not take an expansive view of Congress' powers.

Both the Obama administration and the health care law's challengers believe they can attract the four other Republicans

Turn to **JUSTICES**, Page A4

IN THE NEWS

NATION

Mitt Romney captures Puerto Rico's Republican convention votes and moves on to an important primary in Illinois on Tuesday/**A3**

SPORTS

Brian Conklin, who played at North Eugene High, closes out his college career at Saint Louis in a 65-61 loss to Michigan State in the NCAA tournament/**C1**

CITY/REGION

The vehicle-sharing company WeCar that caters to students plans to increase its car offerings from two to six, including one in Springfield/**B1**

COMING UP >>

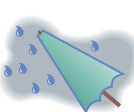
Take a look at the Top 10 outdoor trips from the past year. They include hunting, climbing and kayaking/**Tuesday in Oregon Life**



QUOTABLE

"It affects children, but for them to survive, this is the only industry here."

— **Ranjan Choudhary, a cigarette factory operator discussing India's labor laws allowing children to work in hazardous industries/A8**



Glasses: 12 days remain to reach \$20,000 funding goal

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ever else they had handy. Poppie figured there had to be a better way.

He tried turning his cup around and around in an attempt to mix in the creamer. It worked, sort of. But Poppie — who has a background in chemistry and physics as well as advertising and design — decided that what was really needed was something that would create friction within the cup, something like a blade or vane.

Designing the product

Once his jury duty was over, Poppie went on his way and didn't really think about his idea for the next 20 years as he built his design and advertising firm.

Then, about five years ago, he was visiting a local printing company and once again found himself in a break room, getting a cup of coffee. This time, there were plenty of spoons, dirty ones, lying around on the countertop.

The unappealing sight jogged his memory, bringing back the day at the courthouse all those years ago. That night, he couldn't go to sleep: The idea of creating a mug that would be "self stirring" became an itch he had to scratch.

"I told (my wife) Gretchen, 'I just want to see one,'" he said.

His desk at Poppie Design was soon covered with drawings, plans and bits and pieces of materials — from clay to Styrofoam — before he came up with a workable design that adds angled blades, or fins, to the inside wall of a mug.

Finding a manufacturer

The next challenge was finding a manufacturer willing to tackle something new. Poppie's mentor, Chris Cuning, then CEO of Oak Patch Gifts, recommended a firm in Taiwan that might be willing.

After some initial prodding from Poppie — "They'd never seen anything like this" — the company decided it was game. Then came a period of manufacturing prototypes.

"I'd do the drawing, then you get something back that isn't quite what you want, so you make changes and send another drawing," Poppie said. "Finally, you get to the point where it's working."

After nearly two years, he had what he wanted: a cup that, with a few turns, would mix different liquids or liquids and solids. He put in an order for a few thousand mugs.

"We'd worked on them



KEVIN CLARK/The Register-Guard

The glasses made by Bill Poppie and wife, Gretchen Poppie, have with curved sides that stir the drinks when turned on the table.

so hard, I decided I wanted to have a bunch," Poppie said. "We put them into storage thinking, 'We'll figure out what we're doing with them as we go.'"

But the itch hadn't been fully scratched yet. If cups were good, wouldn't self-stirring glasses be just as good? Poppie thought about his own father.

"My father loves rum and coke," he said. "The first thing that goes in the glass after the rum and the coke is his finger."

Glass initially proved a bit more of a challenge than ceramic. When the Taiwanese company tried to manufacture the glasses, "They broke. Or exploded," Poppie said.

So it was back to the drawing board. After some more tinkering, and broken glass, he came up with a design that would stand up to the manufacturing process and satisfy his aesthetic requirements with a sleek, swirling look and a nice hand feel.

He and his wife both were enchanted by the results. With glass, you could actually see the ingredients mixing, which they discovered when they tested the glasses using water and food coloring.

"We went through a lot of food coloring," Gretchen Poppie said. Bill designed a 10-ounce old-fashioned glass, a 12-ounce tumbler and a 16-ounce iced tea glass.

Raising the money

Then came a period of feverish activity this year for the company the Poppies had christened InStirring, a descriptive name but also an inside joke.

"When our son was young, he couldn't say

"interesting,'" Bill Poppie said. "He'd say, 'That's really instirring.'"

On Valentine's Day, they launched their products on kickstarter.com, which describes itself as "the world's largest funding platform for creative projects."

Part of the beauty of Kickstarter, Poppie said, is that the people seeking funding aren't selling parts of their product or company or borrowing money.

If people like InStirring and are willing to express their support financially, they receive rewards that range from a message of thanks on the company site for pledges under \$15 on up to a case of 24 glasses engraved with a custom logo or design "plus a heartfelt thanks to you on our site" for pledges of \$275 (\$375 or more outside the continental United States).

Hope to produce in U.S.

As of Sunday morning, InStirring had received pledges totaling \$5,323 from 124 backers with 12 days left to reach its goal of \$20,000.

The company will receive the money only if it reaches its full goal by 6 a.m. EDT on March 31, under Kickstarter rules. Poppie said that, even if InStirring doesn't reach its target, he and his wife are still proceeding with their plans.

They have invested a little under \$20,000 so far in the company, he said. "And it would be nice to get it back." But, if they don't, the exposure and feedback they've received from Kickstarter, including a man who wants to be their Belgian

distributor, is valuable.

The Poppies contacted their manufacturer last week and gave the order to start production of the glasses; the first shipment is expected in mid-May.

But that won't be the final step for the project that began 25 years ago. It won't even be the end of the beginning. Bill Poppie is looking ahead to the next step.

"We've got ceramic, we've figured out glass," he said. From there, "you just step over to crystal."

And, he said, "I've really got down to working on the carafe we want to have for wine and water — that's blossomed into wine glasses as well — we're going to start prototyping those."

The Poppies want to bring production of the cups and glasses back to the United States, and are asking for leads on their Kickstarter page. "My dream, of course, would be that we could really end up buying in a

quantity where the price point is fairly reasonable," he said.

The prices for the glasses haven't been set yet, but the Poppies are tentatively thinking \$10 for the mugs, \$12 to \$14 for the glassware and perhaps \$20 to \$25 apiece for the crystal. Sales initially will be online, although the Poppies are hoping to get the drinkware into stores, particularly local ones, and museum gift shops.

They also would like to partner with a local craftsperson interested in mak-

ing mugs. "I love the idea of having something organic and handmade," Bill Poppie said.

Moving toward recycling

And then there's that paper prototype sharing the table at Poppie Designs with the finished glasses and mugs.

"That's actually the beginnings of the design for a recyclable product, a product people could use in their break room or at events ... we're leaning toward trying to design something that would be vegetable-based," Poppie said.

The key will be designing something that's stackable, he said.

Producing recyclable glasses would require linking up with a company that can handle large-scale production, he said. But, he added, "That's the kind of thing we can't get too far ahead of ourselves on."

In fact, he said, he and Gretchen realize that at this point, they're still chasing a dream, and they may not catch it.

"Certainly, there are times when you get presented with the idea that it may not happen," he said. "You have to be the one who says you're going to make it happen. But it all comes with the caveat that there's no guarantee."

And, if InStirring doesn't make it as a business, he added philosophically, "I've got a lot of really great Christmas gifts for the next few years."

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05/04/2011

Kickstarter: Game developer hit it big

Continued from Page A1

money toward a pre-set dollar goal and receive various rewards in return, depending on the amount pledged. Plus there's a feel-good factor and a direct connection to the inventor, artist or entrepreneur, Kickstarter says.

Applicants must apply to be on the website — the Kickstarter staff decides whether the project meets the guidelines spelled out on the site. If a project is accepted, it has a specific amount of time to raise the dollar goal its owner or developer has set. If the project doesn't make the goal, no money changes hands.

Last fall, for example, a National Geographic photographer launched a Kickstarter project to find a da Vinci painting that historians believed was hidden behind a centuries-old mural in an Italian church, according to Kickstarter's blog.

The project didn't make its financing goal, Kickstarter staff said, but the photographer was vindicated when researchers announced earlier this month that they believed they might have found the painting in the spot the photographer had identified.

At the other end of the financing scale is Double Fine Adventure,

a newly developed video game, which had a record-breaking run on the site.

The game's developers met their pledge goal of \$400,000 in their first eight hours on the site on Feb. 7, according to the Kickstarter blog. But the money continued to roll in. By the end of their final week on Kickstarter, they had more than \$3.3 million in pledges. In return, donors were offered rewards that ranged from the finished game plus

some extras (pledges of \$15 to \$29) on up to lunch with the game developers and a tour of their offices, in addition to all the lower-tier awards, including an original painting of the art used in the game and a mini-portrait of the donor, painted by the game's artist.

Only four of those reward packages were offered, for a pledge of \$10,000 or more. They sold out.

— Ilene Aleshire

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