

Lavender harvest without the labor?

Patent pending on machine to expedite defoliation

by **BETTY OPPENHEIMER**
Sequim Gazette Staff Writer

Rob Nelson has been an inventor all his life.

Most recently, he was asked by Jadyne Reichner of Purple Haze Lavender Farm if he could design a machine that would speed up the process of defoliating lavender. Removing the dried flowers from the thousands of harvested and dried stems is a time-consuming and labor-intensive part of the processing of lavender from plant-to-product, so Nelson set out to mechanize it.

"Now that people are really serious about lavender, we need to develop machinery to meet the industry needs," said Nelson, a Sequim native who has moved away and come back to Sequim several times.

To get started designing the bud separator, he evaluated the rolling and rubbing motions used by lavender farm employees to separate the buds from the stems and then sat down at the computer to work out the details with his 3-dimensional computer-aided design program. The result is a machine that is fed dried bundles of lavender, rolls the bundle through a series of belts, drops the dried flower bud into a hopper, and shoots out a bundle of clean lavender stems in four seconds.

"This is the only machine I am aware of that can process an intact bundle. The employees at Purple Haze can do it manually in 45 seconds," said Nelson. "Our machine does it 10 times faster."

Nelson applied for a patent on

Riverside Lavender machine

Who: Rob Nelson, CAD designer and owner of Riverside Auto Rebuild

Where: 425 E. Washington St. No. 8, Sequim

Contact: 582-3084

Lavender sachet/bud separating machine available through:
Purple Haze Lavender
180 Bell Bottom Road, Sequim
582-1131

the machine the day before the Celebrate Lavender Festival began, and he did live demonstrations of the machine all weekend at Purple Haze's farm.

"Seventeen lavender growers from Washington, Oregon, California, Massachusetts and Texas expressed interest in more information," he said, adding that the designs are currently out for bid, and that pricing will be significantly reduced if he builds 10 or more machines at once.

"It's a whole system," Nelson explained, "from bundle to bud, with attachments for dust collection, sorting and grading. The rubber band on the bundle is actually part of the patent." He added that since the cleaned stems come out still banded, there is product potential even for the waste product. "It doesn't add secondary processing. When it's done, the bundle goes into waste collection and can be used for something else."

The design is currently out for bid with fabricating companies worldwide.

"The CAD program enables people like me to design and send by e-mail to companies world-

wide," he said, explaining that the parts will be cut by subcontractors elsewhere, and he intends to build the equipment right here in Sequim. The CAD design can be read by standardized equipment so that water-jet and laser-cutting equipment will produce exactly what Nelson specifies by reading his computerized prints.

"Purple Haze will market the machines," he said, "and they have already committed to purchasing one."

Since 1978, Nelson has been doing auto body work, and in 1980, he opened Riverside Auto Rebuild.

"Body work is what I do. It's getting to be a lost art," he said of his trade. But all the while, he has engaged in design.

"I never have been able to keep my hands out of inventing things," he said, adding that he also has three other patents filed, including an herb press and auto body items. He also designed the salmon boning machinery used by TBRS (Total Bone Removal Systems) of Sequim, who travel to Alaska to process salmon into completely boneless fillets at sea, and digitized artist Dale Faulstich's designs for the 7 Cedars Casino's patio so that the parts could be fabricated in three dimensions and water jet cut from 1.5-inch thick aluminum.

Although at times his inventive personality and tendency to awake in the middle of the night with new ideas seem like a curse, this is his philosophy:

"If you're a creative person, you're doing the world a disservice by not putting your hands to work."

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Innovation Law Group, Ltd., announced the grant and issuance of United States Patent No. 7,028,844 on April 18 to local inventor **Robert Nelson** of Sequim.

Nelson's patent is directed to a machine that gently and quickly separates buds from bundles of dried lavender without shredding stems or leaves.

He is seeking financial partners to assist in his plans for manufacture and sale or lease of the bud separators to local, regional, and international lavender growers and cooperatives.

Innovation Law Group is located at 237 N. Sequim Ave., Sequim and can be reached at 681-7305.