

# Watering Made Easy

featured in

OFFICIAL DAILY of the  
NATIONAL  
HARDWARE SHOW

Tuesday, May 11, 2004

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## From Enron to sprinklers: Former designer turns inventor

BY TIM NASH

One word is all that's needed to explain why Eric Eden suddenly found himself with a lot of free time on his hands — Enron.

Until 2001, Eden worked for Enron, as a designer/draftsman making good money and, thankfully, putting some away. He had put in eight years with the Houston-based giant. Then the company imploded in a wave of greed, accounting scandals, and corporate tomfoolery. Eden never saw the end coming, but he was prepared, nonetheless. He had saved some money and in the back of his mind — as well as his desk drawer — he had an idea.

Eden called himself a cheap sprinkler guy, saying he would buy two or three a year and always had a bunch of dead ones hanging around his garage. He was tired of messing around with what in essence were disposable sprinklers.

"I was going to put an underground sprinkler system in my yard, and one day I was at Lowe's looking at them," said the 35-year-old Houston resident. "It just came to me. I batted it around a little bit, and showed it to some of the people I work with. But I didn't do anything with it." When I lost my job, instead of looking for another job I decided to make a go at it with my invention. The reaction I got from people was awesome. Everyone told me to keep going."

His invention is called Watering Made Easy, and he is exhibiting it in the New Products World. In his first



Watering Made Easy is compromise between the regular old sprinkler that attaches to a hose and an expensive underground sprinkler system. Made of plastic and buried in the ground at lawn level, Watering Made Easy is hooked up to a hose with a connector. Because the sprinkler head is buried at ground level, it is not at risk from the lawn mower.

two months at his new job, Eden made 75 to 100 sprinklers with the help of friends he invited over for "sprinkler parties." His wife, Sharon, works from home, where they have two children, to help market the product.

Most of his early sales were by word of mouth or on ebay, but Eden recently teamed with Handy Hardware, a Texas wholesale company, to open the door for Watering Made Easy to be carried in 1,200 Ace Hardware stores in nine states. His product will be in Houston-area Wal-Mart stores by June.

"Basically, people will pay \$2-3,000 to put in an underground sprinkler system, or they will put a sprinkler on top of their lawn," said Eden. "This product is an intermediate point because you bury it in the ground, but you still connect the hose to it with a quick connector.

You drag the hose out and connect it, and you can put it on a timer so it shuts off by itself.

"Using our sprinkler removes the tedious, repetitive task of placing and aiming it, and it greatly reducing the time and effort you put into watering your lawn. And our product is permanent, so for the same cost as the lawn sprinklers you probably purchase every year.

"In a nutshell, you are not clowning around moving the sprinkler around the yard," he explained.

The sprinkler heads cost about \$40 each and full-lawn coverage will run you roughly \$200. It comes in three styles. Original Sprinkler Station covers 70 feet in diameter. Sprinkler Station Jr. covers 30 feet in diameter, and the Sprinkler Station Squared covers a 9 x 18 ft., 4 x 15 ft. or 4 x 30 ft. rectangle.

Eden also sells replacement covers, shut-off timers, a variety of hose

connectors, a winterizer kit, a faucet Y-splitter, a five-hose brass manifold with shut-off valves, a four-pattern nozzle and a nine-pattern nozzle.

Eden is at the National Hardware Show trying to expand his sprinkler's reach past the nine states in which it is currently available. He says he is planning to meet with Lowes and continue discussions with Wal-Mart.

"I want to get with the national big box movers," he said. "I'm focusing on signing up distributorships. I'm in nine states now, and I want to get hooked up with the rest of the country."

As for Enron, Eden is not bitter. He says he learned a great deal working there, and the knowledge he gained is helping him as an entrepreneur. He does hope, however, that Jeffrey Skilling, Enron's scandal ridden ex-CEO, has to move to a new house without an underground sprinkler system.