

# Successful inventor says corporations lack vision

WESTON, Conn. (AP) — Inventor Stanley Mason, who lays claim to the world's first microwave cookware, the squeezable ketchup bottle and the granola bar, among other things, says he's seen a lot of million-dollar ideas get lost because of a lack of vision in corporate America.

Like the disposable diaper he designed, Mason, who's been called "the Wizard of Weston," hopes to do his part to remedy that shortsightedness with a course on creativity he's teaching to graduate business students at the University of Connecticut's Stamford campus.

The inventor has a laboratory on a two-story barn where elaborate — and secret — experiments are in progress.

Mason isn't trying to turn his students into Thomas Edisons, but he does think he can impart some of his curiosity and ability to think creatively, which he credits for the 30 patents he holds.

"In large companies, people are divided up into departments that are so insular, they don't understand what goes on in the next office," Mason said at Simco Inc., the product development company he founded in 1973 after a corporate career.

"They don't understand the totality, the continuum, the interaction between products and consumer," he said.

"It's possible, with patience, to teach people how to think in a creative way, how to take a tentative point of view about everything, how not to be so damn sure about everything."

Norman C. Parrish of Moraga, Calif., president of the National Congress of Inventor Organizations, calls Mason "one of the most widely respected inventors" in America.

Mason's work, he says, is "valuable

enough that Johnson & Johnson and companies of that caliber give him essentially open contracts to come up with new products for them."

Most people make the mistake of thinking that being an inventor simply means dreaming up a great idea, Mason says, but the successful inventor is someone who recognizes the market for a product that doesn't yet exist, and figures out how to provide it.

They returned to the classroom, divided up into three companies, and spent the rest of the night playing ideas off each other.

"It sort of frees one's way of thinking," says David Chang, a research chemist at Clairol Inc. who is working toward his master's in business administration.

"It will be very, very helpful to people in technical management," Mason has experienced the frustra-

and those painful pricks from safety pins.

So when he was working for a major paper-products company, he designed a disposable diaper lined with soft, absorbent paper, shaped like an hourglass to fit a baby's bottom, and substituted sticky tape for pins.

The company patented the invention and Mason got \$100 for his efforts. The company, which he didn't want to be identified, sold the patent rights to another corporation, which also failed to act on the idea.

Since then, shaped disposable diapers have become a billion-dollar product line.

Such lack of vision helps explain why half the patents issued in America last year went to inventors outside the country, Mason says.

"Product development is a risky business," he says.

"There's no security in working in product development in any U.S. company because if the product doesn't work, they kill the messenger."

According to one survey, the average tenure for research directors at American corporations is only 13 or 14 months, Mason says.

"I've worked for lots of companies — I've been fired from lots of companies," he says.

Today, Simco's clients include 40 Fortune 500 companies, such as Johnson & Johnson, Kimberly-Clark Corp., Procter & Gamble Co., Hunt-Wesson Foods Inc. and Primerica Corp.

It has a full-time staff of about eight employees, plus about 125 associates, mostly academics, who provide creative input on various projects, such as Mason's latest venture: how to get petroleum substitutes, including fuel, from Chinese tallow trees.

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Mason's 15-week course consists of a series of three-hour seminars that include lectures by successful entrepreneurs and exercises designed to stretch the students' minds.

For one recent assignment, he sent students into a Norwalk store and told them to pick out a product that they as consumers thought needed improvement.

trations of corporate life firsthand.

In the 1970s, when he developed Masonware, which he says was the first cookware for microwaves, Mason was told by a major American corporation there was no market for it.

Today, such cookware is a \$350 million-a-year business, he says.

When he developed the granola bar as an alternative snack product for Nestle S A in the 1970s, the company decided it wasn't interested. Quaker Oats Co. and others eventually came out with their own.

Then there was the disposable diaper debacle. Mason was exasperated trying to put a square diaper on his son's round bottom — not to mention the drudgery of laundry

## Steps

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eye, which he liked."

On some shows, the costumes start from scratch, and on others costumes are built on foundations built for other shows.

"The students who help build the costumes are theater majors and those students who are taking Intro to Theater or a costume lab," Kelly says.

"They put from four to eight hours a week building costumes, and some work more hours."

"On really big shows we bring in two seamstresses who act as stitchers and work on more complex costume parts."

Technical crews are staffed by theater arts majors.

"Some students are not interested in acting and work on crews," Pomo says. "Others do crew for one show and act in the next show."

"We have different crews for different callings such as sound, props, lighting, costumes and for striking (dismantling) the set."

"People do different tasks to make the show run smoothly."

"The budget for each show differs depending on the type of play."

"Period pieces would naturally cost more," Pomo says.

If five weeks to produce a show sounds like a rush, it can be, but the director, cast and crew often work overtime to get the show just right.

"Five weeks is pushing it," Pomo says. "But we are fortunate to have some very dedicated people who are willing to put in the extra hours on a show."

"If you are a theater major, you are completely dedicated to the theater."

"The theater is an art. It takes

many hours of rehearsal, polish and concentration so that you may become a good performer. Most of our students go to classes and then all they do is theater."

One of the most important parts of an Aggie Players production is drawing the crowd to the theater.

"Publicity for shows is handled through posters, radio and newspaper advertisements and a direct mail campaign," Dr. Roger Schultz, director of theater arts, says.

"Posters are notoriously ignored by the public, and word of mouth is the best form of advertising. People see the show and tell others about it."

Once the preparation is complete, the show opens. If the show is a main stage production it will run for two weekends. In the studio productions, the show is performed during one weekend.

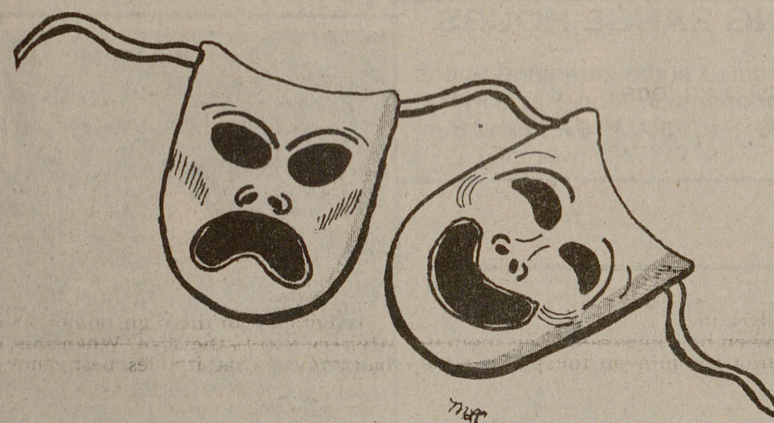
The main stage season is one in which the shows are directed and designed by faculty with the public in mind, Pomo says.

The studio season is more experimental, and on some productions, students are given the opportunity to design and direct.

After the production closes, the department often has "post-mortems."

"We have outside experts brought in to evaluate the production," Pomo says.

"They evaluate the director, the designers and the students. We fully realize that putting the show on and striking the set is not enough. We still need to learn from the process after the process is over."



## Behind

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are designed by the faculty, but the student technical crew is in charge of the building of the costume and sets."

During the season, all the shows overlap, and this year Rabensburg has rushed from one project to another with break-neck speed.

"There are some days when I could scream because I have so much to do and don't think I'll be able to finish everything," she says. "But that feeling doesn't last long."

●If you saw the Aggie Players' show "Another Antigone," you may have noted the crumbled neo-classical Greek set. The designer of that set was sophomore theater arts major Rick Boultinghouse.

Boultinghouse readily says he would rather be behind the scenes than on stage.

"I like set design better than acting," he says. "I guess I feel more in control as a designer. Actors have to work around my designs."

He done set and lighting design for one show and properties design for several other shows while at A&M.

For the student production "Another Antigone," Boultinghouse was able to design alone. He says he

enjoyed working in conjunction with the play's student director, Troy Herbert.

"For 'Another Antigone,' Troy gave me an idea of what sort of set he wanted," he says. "Troy said he wanted a set that was many-leveled and Greek. The director works hand in hand with the designer."

Boultinghouse drew rough sketches and built a model of his

**"For now, I will do whatever I'm needed for. If they want me to sew costumes, I'll sew costumes and if they need me to paint, I'll paint. It's all theater."**

— Rick Boultinghouse, set designer

conception of the "Antigone" set, and Herbert approved the design after a few minor changes. Boultinghouse got the opportunity to design the set and lights for Herbert by asking for the chance.

Boultinghouse also has an assistantship for his technical work that pays about \$400 a semester. He

## Theater arts majors at A&M get good education, chance to try everything, graduate says

By Thomas Boylan

ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

Texas A&M, a bastion of technical education, isn't all technical. It has its share of liberal arts, and one of those arts is theater. Many have heard of the Aggie Players, but not so many know that A&M has a theater arts major.

Matt Hunt graduated with a theater degree last December. He said the running gag in the department was about interaction with fellow Aggies who were not theater majors.

"You tell someone on campus you're a theater major and the reply is, 'Oh, I didn't know we had a theater degree here,'" he said.

Hunt, a past president of the Aggie Players, recommends getting into Texas A&M's theater arts program.

"The department is small enough and the people are good enough that you can get a good education here," he said. "It's not a fine arts program, not just for actors."

Hunt gave advice for people new to the theater arts department: "Do it all," he said. "The best part about A&M is that if you're willing to work, you can do just about anything. I've produced a play that I wrote and associate-directed it."

He says his favorite kind of

the Trenton Free Public Library, which also served as one of 12 regional depositories for patents issued by the U.S. Patent Office.

He'd spend hours poring over other people's inventions, and realized that's what he wanted to do with his life.

"Part of what I do is feed my unconscious and conscious brain with lots of things," he says.

"It's furniture you move around in your head and the more that you have there, the more connections take place."

drama is experimental, which he defines as "not held by the laws of straight continuity — very movement and music oriented."

Even more challenging, however, he says, is multicultural theater.

Dr. Robert Tomo created The Elenco Experimental, a multicultural experimental theater group that meets for two hours every day, all year long. Hunt says working in that group is more intensive than any class.

Mark Hadley has been at A&M long enough to earn a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's of business administration. He now works for the theater under an assistantship from the theater department.

"While I was getting my M.B.A. I took an acting class from Charles Gordone," he said.

"I guess his attitude and the whole thing of theater struck a nerve with me."

"I was trying to decide what to do with my M.B.A., and the longer I stayed and the more productions I was in, the more my love for theater grew."

With his assistantship he hopes to stay with the department until next May. But he is not planning on staying forever, and he has begun applying around the state for a job as a theater/business manager.

assistant in the scene shop," he says. "Jimmy Humphries, faculty scene designer and technical director for Theater Arts Department, is my boss. As a technical assistant it is my job to get whatever it is he tells me to build."

Griffin says he gets a crew together and people who want to help. He then goes around and monitors each group as it works the set.

"I really love working behind the scenes as well as on the stage," Griffin says. "My technical resume lists welding, mixing paints, and crew supervision. The surface of scene design is much deeper than just building. It really is a lot of fun."

Griffin admits that it is difficult for him to decide if acting or being offstage is more exciting.

"I'm the type of guy who likes attention and I came to A&M on an acting scholarship as well as an assistantship," he says. "I've acted in at least one production every semester that I've been at A&M, except this

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— Billy Griffin, technical assistant

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semester."

He says he wanted to get more experience with technical work and try his hand at stage managing.

"I think it is more satisfying to work behind the scenes because you get to sit back and see what you have done," Griffin says. "Acting is inspirational or on-the-spot, and after you're through with the play, it's over. As opposed to working on the set, you still have the renderings, the model of the set to look back on. There are also the memories of the good times during the actual building of the set."

Griffin says he enjoys his work even though it often involves a lot of time. He says he thrives on the work and being on projects with other theater majors.

"Technical work is sometimes hard to get people to work on because they are not on the stage getting the attention," he says. "But there are not really any personal drawbacks to being behind the scenes. If there were I wouldn't be here."