

What a great way
to unwind ...

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J-wheelz, a new product that attaches to the wheels of ATVs, will allow a four-wheeler to tackle any type of terrain with ease – including mud, snow and water. Created by Jacob and John Mills of rural Volga, the product is expected to be on sale by the end of the summer. In developing their product, the father-son team turned to the Enterprise Institute for help. (Photos courtesy of Jacob Mills)

They all had great ideas for inventions

... but then what?

■ Area inventors turn to Enterprise Institute for help

By JILL FIER
The Brookings Register

The Enterprise Institute (EI) in Brookings has worked with more than 1,200 entrepreneurs and inventors since the non-profit corporation got its start eight years ago.

Among those clients are countless stories of innovative men and women who have seen their ideas and products blossom into successful businesses.

While many EI clients have taken their companies to other communities throughout the Midwest and even beyond, a large number remain and are thriving in the Brookings area.

J-wheelz rolls out new product

One inventor who's launching his product in this city is Jacob Mills.

Jacob and his father, John, both of rural Volga, hold the patent to a new product they call J-wheelz.

The plastic and foam pieces don't look like much by themselves. But when they're bolted



Jacob Mills

onto the wheels of an ATV, riders can take their vehicles pretty much anywhere, transforming an average outing into an extreme experience, Jacob explained.

"(The product) does two things. It provides additional traction, like if you're driving in snow or mud or off-roading, and then because of the buoyancy properties, it also floats your four-wheeler. So if you're ice fishing and your

ATV fell through the ice, it wouldn't end up at the bottom of the lake.

"The shape of the attachment, it's tapered, and that means that as you sink lower, you get more traction."

Jacob, a 24-year-old who graduated from St. Paul's Concordia University just this spring with a degree in business, said he and his dad began working on J-wheelz prototypes about two years ago.

Jacob said he hopes the product is ready to be sold by August. Final designs have gone to two area manufacturers, and molds are being pro-

INVENTORS: A little help from friends

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duced now. When finished, the Mills hope to sell the product both at ATV dealerships and through direct phone and Internet orders.

Jacob and his father began working on the attachment when John's four-wheeler kept getting stuck in the snow one winter, but the pair went through six prototypes before getting everything just right with the seventh.

Jacob explained, "We weren't initially trying to invent a new product. We were solving a personal problem, and when it worked so well, a light bulb kind of came on."

The pair went to the Enterprise Institute for the first time last fall for market research and financial projections.

"It was one of the first places we could comfortably expose other people to the product without worrying about losing our intellectual property. When you have a new idea, you want to tell people about it and you want to develop it, but you don't want to risk someone else taking that idea."

Jacob is technically the only full-time employee of J-wheelz, but he turns to his father, former owner of Mills Construction and now a real estate developer, for business guidance and advice.

Before it's even available to the public, J-wheelz is already an award winner. Jacob took top honors in a state contest, the Governor's Giant Vision competition student category, this year.