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Tablet Computer Stand from UNH “MacGyver” Gets University’s First Design Patent

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UNH News Release: Tablet Computer Stand from UNH “MacGyver” Gets University’s First Design Patent



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May 22, 2013

Tablet Computer Stand from UNH “MacGyver” Gets University’s First Design Patent



The AT Pad Stand, created by University of New Hampshire professor Therese Willkomm, has received UNH’s first design patent from the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. Credit: UNH Office for Research Partnerships and Commercialization.

DURHAM, N.H. – A fully flexible, portable stand for tablet computers has received the University of New Hampshire’s first-ever design patent from the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. UNH professor Therese Willkomm, often called the “MacGyver” of assistive technology, originally created the AT (assistive technology) Pad Stand as a presentation stand and a hands-free solution for people with disabilities to use tablet computers like the iPad but has since found myriad additional uses.

“It could be a book holder for somebody with low vision. With an attachment it could hold a cup. If you had a stroke it could hold your hair dryer. You can use it to position the iPad’s camera in any number of ways,” she says. When a student joined a class from a distance by FaceTiming into Willkomm’s iPad, she mounted the tablet on her stand on the student’s desk. “We put a t-shirt on it and called it a virtual student,” says Willkomm, an assistant professor of occupational therapy at UNH and director of ATinNH, a statewide assistive technology program housed at UNH’s Institute on Disability.

The AT Pad Stand's unique feature is its flexible center stand and swivel mounting plate which allows iPads and other tablets be positioned at any height, angle, or distance from a user's face. "There are plenty of iPad stands out there, but they're all vertical," Willkomm says. The flexibility of the AT Pad Stand demonstrates particular promise for using the iPad's high-quality camera at any angle. It's also highly portable, unsnapping into two lightweight pieces and slipping into a backpack.

In order to protect the stand's innovative design, Willkomm worked with Timothy Willis, licensing manager in UNH's Office for Research Partnerships and Commercialization (ORPC), to file UNH's first design patent application in June 2012. Design patents offer a different type of protection than utility patents and are generally quicker to gain registration by the USPTO. The ORPC is now seeking a licensee for the design patent to produce and sell the AT Pad Stand for the general public.

"Therese's innovation is a perfect example of how creativity and intellectual property can work together to improve people's lives," Willis says. "End users get the product, Therese gets constant feedback for her work, and UNH receives the dual benefit of royalty income and seeing our intellectual assets reach the market. Everyone wins."

Willkomm earned her "MacGyver" nickname for her talent for turning ordinary, inexpensive items like Plexiglas, tape, PVC, and, in the case of the AT Pad Stand, an industrial flexible hose called Loc-Line, into assistive technology solutions that make working, living, learning and playing easier for people with disabilities. This is the only one of her 600-plus inventions that's been patented; the rest she eagerly shares with others who appreciate the speed and ease of creating them. She has written several books and handbooks on assistive technology, including "Assistive Technology Solutions in Minutes: Ordinary Items, Extraordinary Solutions," available soon through the Institute on Disability bookstore (www.iodbookstore.com).

The ORPC at UNH was established in 2000 to manage, leverage, and license UNH's intellectual assets while promoting traditional pursuits of publishing and open dissemination of research results. For more information on licensing or the design patent of the AT Pad Stand, contact Timothy Willis (timothy.willis@unh.edu).

Assistive Technology in New Hampshire (ATinNH; www.atinnh.org) is New Hampshire's statewide assistive technology program and a priority area of the UNH Institute on Disability (IOD). The IOD was established in 1987 to provide a coherent university-based focus for the improvement of knowledge, policies, and practices related to the lives of persons with disabilities and their families. Its mission is to promote full access, equal opportunities, and participation for all persons by strengthening communities and advancing policy and systems change, promising practices, education, and research.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students. Learn more at www.unh.edu.

Photographs available to download:

<http://www.unh.edu/news/releases/2013/may/ipad.jpg>

Caption: The AT Pad Stand, created by University of New Hampshire professor Therese Willkomm, has received UNH's first design patent from the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

Credit: UNH Office for Research Partnerships and Commercialization

<http://www.unh.edu/news/releases/2013/may/Therese.jpg>

Caption: Therese Willkomm, an assistant professor of occupational therapy at UNH and director of ATinNH, a statewide assistive technology program housed at UNH's Institute on Disability.

Credit: UNH Institute on Disability

Therese Willkomm is available at therese.willkomm@unh.edu or 603-862-1056.

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