

Catholic inventor uses talents to help others

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Mention the name of inventor Thomas Edison, and people think of the light bulb.

Or toss out the names of Orville and Wilbur Wright, and the airplane comes to mind.

But in years to come, if the name of George Glassow comes up in conversation, people may think of ... toilets.

Glassow is about to apply for a patent for a toilet he has designed to move up or down to accommodate the height or physical limitations of users. Along with the toilet, the St. Monica's parishioner is developing a bathroom sink that would likewise move up or down, and sensors that would automatically adjust both fixtures to the proper height whenever a person enters the room.

The toilet would be invaluable for people with disabilities, Glassow said, or for homes with small children.

Children, in fact, were his inspiration to begin working on the device.

When Glassow was dating his future wife — Pilar Vilar-Glassow — she mentioned that a back problem had made it hard for her to toilet train her children. Suddenly, the idea of a height-adjusting toilet occurred to him.

"I did it as a joke, originally," Glassow acknowledged.

But as the inventor developed prototypes for the toilet, he realized that such a device would be beneficial for people with disabilities, so he pursued the project in earnest.

Concern for the disabled comes naturally for Glassow, who said he suffers from a manic-depressive syndrome. That syndrome forced him to retire in 1981 from Eastman Kodak Company, where he worked as a tool maker.

Glassow is still struggling with the illness that has plagued him since the 1960s. Doctors have been trying to find the right medication to help him maintain a balance between the deep depressions and the manic phases typical of the illness.

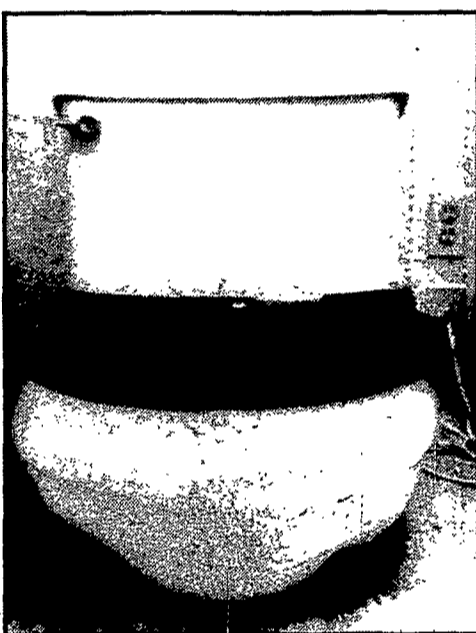
Yet Glassow has discovered positive aspects to his problem.

"To my way of thinking, God gave me this time (of not working) to get to know him," Glassow explained. The inventor suggested that the illness also enhances his creativity.

"When you have highs and lows," Glassow explained, "if you produce when you have highs, you're a better than a nor-



George Glassow and his wife, Pilar Vilar-Glassow, embrace in front of an image of the Holy Spirit attached to the mirror in their bedroom. Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer



Glassow is about to apply for a patent for a toilet he designed to move up or down to accommodate the height or physical limitations of users. Along with the toilet, the St. Monica's parishioner is developing a bathroom sink that would likewise move up and down, and sensors that would automatically adjust both fixtures to the proper height whenever a person enters the room.

mal person."

During his years at Kodak, those highs manifested themselves in a kind of workaholicism, Glassow observed. Since he retired, the highs have allowed him to create not only the toilet, but to renovate a house he obtained through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in 1981.

The house is attractive today, but Glassow said it was a wreck when he bought it. "The only thing that was really good was the shell," he remarked.

The roof leaked, the plaster was falling off the walls, the copper pipes had all been stolen, and the basement had a foot of ice in it, Glassow recalled. And because vandals kept breaking in, he was forced to sleep on the floor in the living room to protect his investment.

Such determination is typical of Glassow. "I'm diligent," he observed. "If I can't make it work, I'll keep at it until I at least make it work half way."

Although a dilapidated structure might seem a nightmare to most home buyers, Glassow said the project helped him with his mental problems by providing a focus for his creative energies. "(My wife) said, 'Why do you do all of this,'" he joked. "I said, 'It was cheaper than therapy.'"

Getting the house in the first place was a kind of miracle, Glassow said, noting that he had submitted unsuccessful bids on a several other houses.

"When I was bidding (on this house), I promised God when I got the house looking decent, I'd do something to let people know a Christian lived here," Glassow said.

Glassow made good on his promise by erecting in his front yard a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary atop a replica of the world. The statue depicts Mary crushing a snake beneath her foot. "I thought to myself that if you want to show reverence to God, the way to do it is to show respect to his mother," he noted.

When he began renovating the house, Glassow realized he could not do all the work himself. But he found a solution through remembering his experiences at Kodak, where he had helped train apprentices.

Thus Glassow began taking on apprentices to help with his house. These apprentices — sometimes students from Monroe Community College, where his wife teaches English as a second language, other times young people referred to him through acquaintances and friends — provide manual labor, while learning such skills as plumbing, electrical work, carpentry and masonry.

One of the workers even helped Glassow represent a spiritual notion. An artist, the young man produced an image of the Holy Spirit, which Glassow then attached to a mirror in his bedroom. When a person stands before the mirror, the Holy Spirit becomes a part of the reflection.

"The Holy Spirit is right within you," Glassow noted. "You see it first thing when you get up in the morning."

Glassow credits God with helping him find balance in his life in the midst of illness. He also credits his wife, whom he married 11 years ago, with helping him find peace. "She's had a big impact on my life," he declared.

Likewise, Glassow hopes to make some kind of an impact on the world.

"I'm probably looking for something to do that would help someone," Glassow said. "That's probably my goal: to leave the world a little better than I found it."

And Glassow wants to show that despite his illness, he is able to make a contribution to the world. He hopes his example will help other people with disabilities.

"Just because you have a disadvantage doesn't mean you have to give up," Glassow declared. "You can still do things."

DePrez Travel Bureau
Announces
Canadian Rockies
Depart July 8-17, 1991

Features Calgary Stampede - Visit Banff
Lake Louise - Columbia Icefields - Jasper
Vancouver - Victoria to see the famous
Butchart Gardens.

Hosted by Richard Pringle
Limited Membership

DePrez Travel • 42-8800