First Cool Idea! Winner Brings Relief to the Table

"Completely tasteless." You couldn't pay Don Ladanyi a nicer compliment. Tastelessness is what his product, the first winner of the Proto Labs Cool Idea! Award, is all about. Proto Labs is awarding up to \$100,000 worth of prototyping and short-run production services through its Cool Idea! Award, and Don's innovative product idea secured a portion of the award to help get his product off the ground.



Figure 1: TruFlavorWare aims to restore the pleasure of eating to chemotherapy patients.

Don's invention, TruFlavorWare®, is a line of eating utensils designed to help make food taste better to people undergoing cancer treatment. One problem cancer patients face at mealtimes is that food flavors are distorted because chemotherapy can cause chemical reactions in the mouth with metal flatware. TruFlavorWare takes that problem off the table. Unlike standard utensils, TruFlavorWare is tasteinert, organic and non-metallic, so it doesn't trigger the bad aftertastes that make it hard to enjoy food.

"Don's taste-inert flatware is a cool idea because it solves a very basic problem—that is, how to neutralize the unpleasant taste caused by standard flatware when your sensitivity to metal or plastic is acute," said Proto Labs founder and CTO Larry Lukis. "With Cool Idea!, we want to stimulate innovation by helping deserving products move past the idea stage to market viability. Toxin-free flatware that restores the dignity of mealtime to cancer patients certainly fits the bill."

Don's inspiration for the product came to him one night at dinner. He was dining with chopsticks and realized that the neutrality of the bamboo heightened the flavor of his food.

"It was a revelation to me when I realized that everyday eating utensils actually interfere with what we taste," Don says. "I knew how unpleasant it was trying to eat when all you can taste is metal or plastic, so I wanted to find a better solution. I wanted to create something that would allow a strawberry fruit salad to taste like a pure strawberry fruit salad, not some harsh metallic version of a fruit salad."

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Figure 2: TruFlavorWare flatware is available in two colors.

In addition to being taste-inert, TruFlavorWare is BPA-free and highly durable, made from a proprietary FDA-approved composite material that has been ergonomically designed and weighted to approximate the substantial feel of traditional flatware. Unlike everyday lightweight plastic flatware, TruFlavorWare is totally dishwasher-safe and lasts a lifetime.

And—key point here—people actually like using it. In an early beta test at a major Ivy League university, a random panel of 100 tasters preferred TruFlavorWare over regular metal flatware by a resounding 2:1 majority.

Don, a former biomedical engineer based in Westlake, Ohio, is launching the TruFlavorWare line in the Cleveland area, with plans to expand to healthcare facilities across the US—thanks to the Cool Idea! Award. As Don puts it, "I couldn't have done this without Cool Idea! I'm absolutely dedicated to the success of this product, and am grateful for the prototype and initial production support from Proto Labs."

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For more information on Don's product, visit www.truflavorware.com.

For more information on our Cool Idea! Award program, visit www.protolabs.com/cool-idea.