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Tippy tanks turn a tire seller into an inventor

People fumbling with tanks led Earl Cogswell to seek a better way. (Barry Chin/Globe Staff)

By: Robert Preer

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HANOVER - Earl Cogswell Jr., a former assistant manager for Sullivan Tire, noticed a curious phenomenon three years ago when he started working at his father-in-law's business, Dick's Power Equipment in Hanover. He would refill propane tanks for customers, then load the tanks in their vehicles - and it wasn't easy.

"People were using all different configurations to keep them from tipping over," he said. "Women would come after grocery shopping and pack the groceries around it. It would fall over and crunch the groceries."

Cogswell asked his suppliers for something to secure the tanks, but couldn't find anything. Thus was born the idea for the Tank Nanny, a skid-free plastic holder that provides a snug fit for the standard 20-pound propane tank. It costs \$18.95 and has a built-in seat belt loop.



Cogswell, 44, sketched the design on napkins and backs of envelopes. His wife, Donna, and daughter Jennifer, an engineer for Pratt & Whitney in Connecticut, helped with the details. Another daughter, Jessica, designed a website, posters, and brochures and created the Tank Nanny logo - a female figure in silhouette.

Cogswell tapped the equity in his Norwell home to raise money, hired an Attleboro engineering firm to prepare a formal plan, and filed an application for a patent.

The potential market is huge. Millions of Americans use refillable propane tanks, mainly for outdoor grills. The tanks last for years but often rust, which can stain a back seat - another reason to have a holder.