



## Building a better umbrella

Local manufacturer innovates to prevent future accidents **PAGE 9**

## Throw-away houses

For over 50 years parking has consistently trumped housing in Northwest



NEWS

## Umbrella makers join push for safer Northwest streets

By Linda McDonnell

The rain is torrential and traffic is heavy, as usual, on Northwest 23<sup>rd</sup> Avenue. You're on foot, ready to cross at the next break between cars, but can you be sure the drivers will see you?

Your chances could soon be better if you have a bright-yellow "Walk Safe" umbrella, which neighborhood residents can now pre-order through the Northwest District Association office for spring delivery.

"It's a real local success story," said Kim Carlson, NWDA Transportation Committee Chair. Carlson and her committee developed the idea for the umbrella following the death of neighborhood resident Sarah Cogan, who was struck when she and a companion were crossing Northwest 23<sup>rd</sup> Avenue at Quimby on a rainy January evening one year ago. Cogan's companion was injured in the accident. According to reports, the driver claimed not to have seen them.

Following the fatality, City Commissioner Sam Adams initiated a joint meeting with the Portland Office of Transportation, the Nob Hill Business Association and NWDA. From that meeting, Carlson and her committee developed the idea of a bright yellow umbrella with a "Yield to Pedestrians" symbol on it. Meeting participants liked the idea and encouraged NWDA to pursue it.

Carlson took the safety umbrella concept to local umbrella manufacturer ShedRain.

"As fate would have it, the owners of ShedRain were friends of Sarah Cogan," explained Carlson. "I was contacted by a manager in their marketing and design group who informed me of ... their wish to make this umbrella for us."

Jeff Blauer, executive vice president of business development for ShedRain and a member of the company's founding family, told the Examiner: "Mrs. Cogan was a personal friend of the family. Her death raised serious issues surrounding the safety of pedestrians in our pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods.

"Developing the 'Walk Safe' umbrella was one way that we could lend a hand by doing what we do best — manufacture umbrellas and rain gear. We were happy to work with the Northwest District Association and PDOT to create a product that is a new way for pedestrians to take safety into their own hands."



Jeffrey Blauer, executive vice president of ShedRain, demonstrates the special umbrella his company developed to improve pedestrian safety.

Carlson explained how the umbrella's combination of iridescent yellow fabric, reflective trim and clear panels make up its safety design.

"The iridescent yellow is particularly visible on cloudy, gray and wet days, at dawn and at dusk," noted Carlson. The reflective trim highlights the pedestrian symbols on two sides, plus catching light from headlights and streetlights.

The addition of clear plastic panels is another key safety feature.

"It provides the umbrella carrier with the ability to see approaching traffic from two directions, (giving) him or her the power to make the safe decision to wait curbside," said Carlson.

ShedRain set its designers to work on the idea conceived by Carlson's committee, completing the final design with a curved black handle and automatic opener. In addition, the company decided to include the Walk Safe umbrella in their 2007 catalog, eliminating an enormous barrier for the NWDA: the up-front cost of a 1,200 minimum order.

"ShedRain has been incredibly generous," said Carlson.

The NWDA Transportation Committee is pre-selling the umbrellas. Checks for \$15 may be made out to NWDA and sent to the Neighbors West/Northwest office at 2257 NW Raleigh St. The committee anticipates the umbrellas will be available in April.

According to Carlson, retailers may also purchase them for resale in their shops. Logos can be printed on them for an additional cost of \$1 per color per logo.

The NWDA has also applied for a grant that would allow them to buy a small inventory of umbrellas to sell at the neighborhood office and public events in the neighborhood.

While the umbrella was developed as an aid to pedestrian safety, Carlson stresses the responsibility of walkers to practice safety.

"It is never a good idea to challenge a motor vehicle," she notes. "Those of us who walk or ride a bike are responsible for making ourselves visible, especially during low-light conditions. The Walk Safe umbrella will make pedestrians carrying it more visible in these conditions so motor vehicle drivers obeying traffic laws will stop for us."

ShedRain Corporation is a leading national umbrella and rain gear manufacturer. Founded in 1947 in Portland by the Blauer and Liebreich families, it is now in its third generation as a family-owned company.

Its products have been named Consumer Reports' "Best Umbrella," New York Magazine's "Best Bets" umbrella and The Wall Street Journal's "top wind umbrella." The Weather Channel selected ShedRain as its exclusive umbrella and raingear supplier, according to the company.