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## Howard man's campfire inspires motorized grill

### Brian Begotka rolls out The Automatic Chef

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Brian Begotka of Howard demonstrates The Automatic Chef, a motorized grill he developed and put on the market in late summer. Nathan Phelps/Press-Gazette

After seeing a lot of makeshift campfire grills while camping, Howard resident Brian Begotka took up the task of designing his own motorized version.

The Automatic Chef hit the market late this summer about a year-and-a-half after it was clear the project was moving forward on a larger scale.

"Everywhere you went you saw people hunched over a fire, usually a tripod (grill) with a stick spinning the grill to keep their food from burning," the Green Bay native said. "I saw some single-post models like this and a lot of makeshift garage models out there."

Begotka built what would ultimately be the prototype for the product he took to market.

"Through the course of 12 or 15 camping trips, I was probably approached by 15 or 20 people saying, 'That's really cool' and friends and family said, 'We think you have something there. Why don't you look into it a little further?'" he said. "Then I started design and development stages."

The Automatic Chef uses a rotisserie mechanism set on its end to rotate the grill on a flat axis to cook the food evenly over a campfire or other open flame. The grill height is adjustable, and the support arm swings, allowing the user to turn food away from the fire.

The single-post design also enhances safety, reducing the risk posed by someone tripping or knocking a support out from under a tripod grill, Begotka said.

The rotisserie operates on two D-sized batteries. Begotka said users should get a summer's worth of cooking from one pair. A full warranty covers both parts and shipping.

Begotka, who describes himself as an "average" guy who works full time for Martell Construction, said he's marketing The Automatic Chef to retailers in a 60-mile radius around Green Bay, but would like to see his market area grow.

He anticipates attending a few area trade shows — the Green Bay Home and Garden Show along with the WBAY RV and Camping Show — and has hired a public relations firm to help market the grill.

A friend in Iowa is also helping with marketing in the region.

"I've done some knocking on doors for RV dealerships and campgrounds for next spring. Hardware stores in smaller towns," Begotka said. "It takes three to four months to get rolling."

Begotka's product also includes a trio of accessory hooks on the support arm to keep cooking utensils within reach.

The Automatic Chef breaks down into a hard plastic carrying case about the size of a small suitcase.

It has a retail price of \$149.99, but it is being sold through Automatic Chef's Web site at a 15 percent discount.

While the grill has just hit the market, Begotka has ideas for additional add-on accessories.

In the short term, he's looking forward to spring when stores and campers start looking forward to the 2009 camping season.

"I just felt like it was something I would always wonder what would have happened if I didn't try it," he said. "I visualized this from the get-go, and it's turned out as exactly what I wanted."