



## HW Products

A huge success in the music accessories sector proves useful in the drug and chocolate making industries...and the space program!

HERE'S A QUIZ: WHAT music accessories not only became standards in the music products world, but also found uses in a broad range of other industries including toys, food processing, pharmaceuticals, nuclear power, and aerospace? Epitomizing the notion that it's often the simplest ideas that have the broadest and most lasting appeal, HW Products' HW Pad-Saver de-moisturizer and HW Brass-Saver brush have changed the way musicians care for their horns, extended instruments' lives, lowered their maintenance costs, and provided music retailers with an excellent small goods profit opportunity.

HW Products' name refers to founder and CEO George Koregelos's stint as owner of House of Woodwinds, a specialty retail store in Oakland, California. George and his wife, Georgia, opened the store in 1960. (They are observing their 60th wedding anniversary this year.) The shop sold a full range of horns, but its true claim to fame was as a destination for top players' instrument service and repairs. Koregelos, a saxophonist who was trained in wind and brass instrument repair at the C.G. Conn

school in Elkhart, Indiana, soon counted among his clients and friends such music world luminaries as Jean-Pierre Rampal, James Galway, Stan Getz, Lew Tabackin, and Richard Stolzman.

Between visits from the woodwind gods, Koregelos spent plenty of time in the repair biz trenches, "experiencing the ugliness" of many a moisture-cor-



*At the House of Woodwinds in 1982, George and Angela Koregelos look over a Koregelos flute George built for a customer.*

roded flute and saxophone. Early on he surmised that many students didn't bother to swab out their instruments at all, and the players who did typically used the standard device of the day: a hankie, perhaps with a spreader to give it some bulk, attached to a rod for flutes or a long string with a weight on one end for saxes. "Although that kind of tool probably absorbed some moisture from the small end of the sax," he explains, "it did absolutely no good in the big end or the bow—and it probably pushed moisture into the tone holes," accelerating the disintegration of the pads.

Seeing the same problem day after day, he was inspired to explore different approaches and absorbent materials that would wick moisture away from a saxophone's bore, tone holes, and pads. After much experimentation in the back of his shop he produced a prototype, dubbed the "Shove-It," whose chief distinction was that it was designed to be left in the horn when it wasn't being played, drawing away moisture that would have remained in instruments swabbed in the traditional manner. Over the next two years he developed and refined special swabs for his saxophonist friends and instrument repair customers. Based on those players' enthusiastic reviews, he launched HW Products, Inc. in 1977 and (fortunately) renamed his product the HW Pad-Saver de-moisturizer.

When Koregelos unveiled the first commercial Pad-Saver for sax at the next NAMM show, the market's response was slightly less encouraging.

One leading manufacturer warned, “Be prepared to put \$5 in every case, because that’s what you’re going to lose.” However, rising awareness of Pad-Savers’ simple brilliance gradually drove sales and opened new markets worldwide.



Dealers are selling HW Products’ new “Izzy” as a novelty apparel accessory.

Koregelos explains that music retailers striving to cost-effectively maintain rental fleets saw “a tremendous improvement in the condition and lifespan of their saxes’ pads.” An element of the design that’s beneficial to all players, but especially to young beginners, is that there is very little work, time, or thought required to use it. For example, an end plug attached to the Pad-Saver for sax replaces the standard end plug—the piece of plastic that protects the octave mechanism—that saxophonists automatically insert when they’re finished playing. Over time Koregelos expanded the Pad-Saver product line with models for a variety of instruments.

With Pad-Saver’s sales cruising, in 1980 Koregelos introduced his own line of handcrafted professional flutes. Known for their expressive tone and ease of response, Koregelos flutes are still sought by serious players and collectors.

Flutist Angela Koregelos, George’s daughter, joined HW Products in 1991 to help direct its global sales and enable her father time to address the growing

urgency for new product development. (Soon after the Pad-Saver patent expired in 1997, knock-offs started sprouting up from all corners of the globe.) To the same end, in 1995 George sold the Koregelos flute line to Gemeinhardt.

In 2000, after devoting two years of intensive R&D, HW unveiled its second game-changing maintenance accessory: The Brass-Saver brush. As an instrument repairman, Koregelos had seen countless horns, including some very expensive professional models, damaged by accidents during cleaning. The Brass-Saver’s primary advantage over standard wire and fiber “snake” tools was that it was designed to clean without scratching the horn’s inner tubing. As happened with the Pad-Saver, higher-level players who use the Brass-Saver extol the improved response of their instruments’ glossy-clean—and unscratched—inner bore.

When writing the Brass-Saver’s patent application, Koregelos had the foresight to list a “tremendous variety” of uses, anticipating the brush’s potential functionality “nearly anywhere the inside of narrow and/or curved tubing needed to be cleaned without scouring or scratching.” Over the years he designed and sold specialty brushes to Godiva Chocolatier, Snyder’s Pretzels, and a plasma fractionation plant at Bayer. He even supplied some custom-made brushes to NASA for use on the Space Shuttle! Another brush was sold to clean toxic waste from tubing at a nuclear power plant. Koregelos wryly told the company rep, “If you don’t like it, do *not* send it back!”

Though “custom-designed and accordingly priced,” HW brushes made for these non-music applications were intended for rare or occasional use, and as such contribute only modestly to HW’s total revenue production. However, the company is currently negotiating with another non-music industry to manufacture a specially designed cleaning brush that would require production of up to a million units per year.

HW President Angela Koregelos and Creative Director Liz Schaefer recently designed an adorable cartoon-like face

for the big, fluffy Bell Brush to use in the company’s Pad-Saver marketing materials. Dubbed “Izzy,” the item was originally conceived only to promote the Pad-Saver swab concept, but retailers from as far away as France have begun selling them as apparel accessories—kids are wearing them wrapped around their wrists or backpacks—toys, or “desk companions.” “They’re kind of like pet rocks,” says Angela. “People are intrigued and enchanted with them.”

Meanwhile, retailers the world over continue to value HW Products Pad-Savers and Brass-Savers as attractive and profitable add-on items and instrument purchase enticements. In addition to selling them over the counter, many retailers package them with their instrument rental kits to prolong the life, improve playability, and reduce service costs for instruments they are ultimately responsible for maintaining. In recent years HW Products has set annual Pad-Saver production estimates at 200,000, then adjusts that figure quarterly according to actual sales. After a slight dip over the past two years, 2010 sales appear to be rebounding.



Brass-Saver brush set for trumpet.

Musing over the success of his company, Koregelos reveals, “I wasn’t looking to be an inventor; I just saw a need for a product, and there was nothing on the market that would fill that need. Also, I always look for the simplest way to accomplish a job. We put a lot of thought and effort into designing and perfecting our products, but that inclination has always served me well.”

(510) 614-8722  
www.hwproducts.com