

Ross Appleman's engineering ability helped bring us the garbage disposal and Jacuzzi.

He made motors to fit the gadgets

Retired engineer who helped Mr. Jacuzzi still keeps busy

By Jami Leabow
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Imagine how difficult it would be to clean your kitchen after dinner without a garbage disposal.

And picture yourself in the hospital, your uncomfortable stay made more relaxing with the help of an electric hospital bed.

And think of how nice 10 minutes in a Jacuzzi whirlpool bath would feel right now.

Now, thank Leisure World resident Ross Appleman, a longtime electrical engineer whose most noted inventions include motors for the first garbage disposal, hospital bed and Jacuzzi.

Appleman, 79, spent 40 years in the electrical engineering trade, working for various engineering firms throughout the country. He ended his career in 1967 as an assistant professor of electrical engineering at Cal Poly Pomona.

Appleman said he always had an interest in math and science, even as a child.

"When I was 6 years old, people would ask me what I wanted to be, and I didn't say policeman or anything like that," Appleman recalled. "I told them I wanted to be an electrical engineer. I knew I was going to be one even before I knew what one was."

Appleman was in demand after his 1928 graduation from the University of Illinois, receiving offers from General Electric, Westinghouse and Emerson Electric. He chose Emerson, the company offering the most money — \$112 a month.

It was at Marathon Electric in Wausau, Wis., in the 1930s that Appleman first made a name for himself, though.

"This fella from Milwaukee or Chicago came to us and said he needed a motor to fit his gadget," Appleman said. "He said it was going to grind garbage down the sink. We thought he was crazy. People just took out their garbage back then.

"But we came up with a motor, and we were really surprised how many were bought. Now, I suppose no one lives without one."

A few years later, another engineer in Minnesota asked Appleman to come and help him solve some technical difficulties his company was having. While in Minnesota, Appleman met an inventor — known to him only as "Mr. Jacuzzi" — in a small machine shop.

"He wanted to make a whirlpool," Appleman said. "He said he thought the jets would help people with arthritis. He was fascinated with this gadget of his.

"Now, 50 years later, Jacuzzi isn't such a strange name anymore. It sure helped him. He became quite a customer of ours."

Appleman later moved on to Master Electronics in Dayton, Ohio. His task there was

to convert the standard hand-cranked hospital bed to electric in the 1940s.

"They wanted a bed that would move smoothly without jerking and could hold a 300-pound man," Appleman remembered. "I designed the motor for that one, and within a year, we were out with the 'Cadillac' of beds."

That bed; Appleman said, was more complicated because it required gears for three operations. It raised and lowered the head, bed and feet.

"Between those two beds, that was the biggest customer Master ever had," he said.

Appleman said motor-making wasn't difficult, just occasionally frustrating.

Appleman and his wife, Alberta, moved to Leisure World in 1965. He now lives with his second wife, Mildred, whom he married in 1980. Alberta died in 1978.

After 40 years in the electronics field, Appleman gave it up. Now he stays involved in Leisure World activities as a member of the Lions Club, three ballroom dance groups, Travel Club No. 1, the Masonic Club and the Republican Club. He also served five years as a director of the old First Laguna Hills Mutual. Appleman recently was honored as Leisure Worlder of the Month for October.

"There's two kinds of retirement," Appleman said. "You can be active or you can sit in a rocking chair, telling everyone that everything's going to hell and that in 'my day ...'"