

## **KISS for Wheelchairs: Susan Farricielli Launches Seat Design**

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Allowing wheelchair users to enjoy the luxury (and necessity) of stretching, bouncing, and otherwise moving to avoid problems brought on by sitting all day led sculptor, teacher, and product designer Susan Farricielli to develop Kinetic Innovative Seating Systems (KISS) for wheelchairs. She demonstrates the system against a backdrop of one of her larger sculptures, homage to machine forms of the industrial age.

Imagine sitting in a chair all day with the same rigid shape. For many in wheelchairs, it's a fact of life. But it doesn't have to be, thanks to Susan Farricielli's Kinetic Innovative Seating System (KISS) for wheelchairs.

The Branford native (Branford High School Class of '75) has already built a reputation as a sculptor, product designer, and teacher (at Yale and Quinnipiac universities). Susan also came up with the design for the equatorial sundial the community placed behind Pine Orchard School.

Hearing kids are drawn to the granite installation with its metal band of numbers, she smiles, saying, "If they sit in front of it and look at it, you'll see time fly."

Susan has furthered the sundial design through her Branford company, a.k.a. prototype, developing a metal "neck" that allows some of her sundials to be adjusted for daylight savings time. It's that kind of creative thinking fueling Susan's work on a kinetic wheelchair seat allowing users to stretch, bounce, and basically adjust all day long.

"KISS is a project I've been working on for a very long time," says Susan, who patented her design in 1999.

She began in 1991, inspired by "my grandmother. She was in a wheelchair

and had bad circulation. This is a way to help people reduce some of the symptoms created by sitting in a chair for a long time."

Just last year, Susan's sister also needed a wheelchair. She was able to enjoy relief provided by KISS until illness claimed her life in January.

"I like to think she's blessed it," says Susan, adding the stars have now "completely aligned" to bring her to the point of delivering KISS to the world.

A trained welder who joined the boiler makers union at her first job out of Northern Kentucky University (NKU), Susan also worked for four years at Lippincott, Inc., a Connecticut sculpture "factory." In creating KISS, Susan's first instinct was to blend sculptural and technical innovation to create an entirely new wheelchair. But field research taught her "to keep the most original things," primarily the motion seat, she says.

Susan, who holds a master's in industrial design (Rhode Island School of Design) and undergraduate degree in sculpture (NKU), also won a National Endowment for the Arts grant (Design Arts) in 1994 to further her wheelchair seat design to assist the aged.

Until recently, very little data had been gathered to help prove the important benefits of Susan's design. But that's been changing, with new evidence in published articles, some of which even cite her design.

In the years between beginning her KISS journey and today, Susan's kept busy as a sculptor, as proprietor of a.k.a.prototype, teaching History of Modern Design at Yale School of Architecture (spring semesters) and also teaching through Quinnipiac University's online program. In addition, she began mentoring students from Sacred Heart High School about two years ago. Recently, KISS found an investor and Susan completed a Yale School of Business Management course with several "brilliant" students helping develop a sterling business plan.

"You have to be so vigilant about knowing every detail," Susan says. "If it was easy, everybody would do it. My teachers were ruthless, blunt, and to the point. I love that kind of rigor. Criticism is the best thing. If you can get that barrage of criticism and still stand up, you've got a great idea."

Susan's about to introduce KISS to firms that serve the elderly at a time when Baby Boomers are poised to enter that category (she notes 70 million Boomers turn 65 in 2011).

"It's a sad topic, but it can be an amazing thing, too. If you can make someone's life better, how great is that?"

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*To learn more about KiSS for Wheelchairs, visit [www.kissforwheelchairs.com](http://www.kissforwheelchairs.com)*