

October 19, 1988

Local physician provides global symbol in struggle to halt nuclear armament build up

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by Kimberly Sawtelle

DOVER-FOXCROFT - Political parties and special interest groups around the country will be spending a significant amount of time the next few weeks struggling to convince eligible voters to take advantage of their Constitutional right to vote; to have a voice in the election of the nation's leaders.

The most common argument for not voting, presented by lazy beneficiaries of the democratic American society, is the conception that one voice, like a single pebble lying on a long stretch of beach, makes not one whit of difference in the grand scheme of the universe, country, state or county. If, however, that pebble falls into the shoe of someone walking on the beach, it is noticed immediately. When noticed and flung out into the water, that same pebble will create continuous, ever-widening ripples.

Dr. David Frasz of Dover-Foxcroft is such a pebble.

In 1985, Frasz, quite unwittingly, created a three-dimensional illustration to depict what he believed to be flaws in President Ronald Reagan's Strategic Arms Defense Initiative, "Star Wars," that later became an international symbol for people working to terminate the nuclear arms race.

Frasz said, three years ago, at the height of the controversy over "Star Wars," he "pondered a way to illustrate" the reputed 95 percent effectiveness of Reagan's defense system. "In a moment of inspiration," Frasz said, he created what is now known as the "Star Wars" umbrella.

The prototype for the symbol started as an old umbrella from which Frasz cut quarter-sized holes, making up five percent of the umbrella's total surface area, providing 95 percent protection against the rain.

Since Frasz first introduced the "Star Wars" umbrella to 300 of his colleagues at a Los Angeles meeting of the Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR), reproductions of his peek-a-boo bumbershoot have made appearances in the halls of Washington D.C.'s Capitol Hill, raised controversy on the floor of the House Chamber and most recently was used by a visiting doctor, from Leningrad in the Soviet Union, at a physician-sponsored debate on the arms race at the University of Maine in Orono.

Born of Maine, the national and now global symbol for those opposed to a nuclear build-up, Frasz's grassroots social statement came home.

Frasz said he first understood his umbrella's power to effectively symbolize the "faults of 'Star Wars'" when he presented it at the PSR luncheon meeting in winter, 1985. At the time Frasz was the organization's treasurer.

"They went wild. It was so obvious that a 95 percent effective umbrella is useless," Frasz stated.

Physicians for Social Responsibility is the American branch of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1985. Frasz along with his wife, Dr. Lesley Fernow joined PSR in early 1980 after viewing a presentation about the medical effects of nuclear fallout.

"It became very clear to us that doctors aren't going to be able to do much (to treat casualties of a nuclear attack)," Frasz said. "If there's no cure, then you've got to work out a prevention."

After the Los Angeles meeting, members of the PSR lobby in Washington duplicated 550 "Star Wars" umbrellas by hand. A donor was found to provide the \$2,000 worth of umbrellas needed to allow the project to go ahead.

"We had to do them ourselves by hand," Frasz said. "You can imagine the reaction of umbrella manufacturers when our staff called and tried to ask for a special order of umbrellas with holes. They thought we were crazy, or politely said they weren't equipped to handle such a request."

When the massive project was completed, one customized umbrella was delivered to each Senator and Representative in Congress, according to Frasz.

Once in the hands of Washington's leaders the "Star Wars" umbrellas

immediately became a banner of identification for those opposed to requests for funding of the President's strategic defense plan.

The most dramatic exhibition of the "Star Wars" umbrella took place on the House Chamber floor during a debate over funding for the President's defense project, according to Frasz. As a proponent of the Strategic Defense Initiative spoke, Representative John Seiberling of Ohio, left his seat, opened his gift from PSR, and carrying the riddled umbrella, walked the circuit of the chamber before returning to his seat. His stroll caused pandemonium to break out as "Star Wars" opponents cheered the display and proponents cast outraged remarks at Seiberling's grandstanding.

Afterwards requests for the "Star Wars" umbrella began to pour into the PSR Washington office, said Frasz. A manufacturer was retained to make 25,000 units based on Frasz's original design. The difference in the manufactured models was that they were functioning umbrellas, made from black plastic with clear plastic "holes" in the panels.

Demands for the umbrellas came from other PSR members speaking around the country, additional members of Congress and university teachers, according to Frasz. At last count approximately 100 umbrellas from the original order remained.

Modestly Frasz stated that, "Apparently, somewhere along the way news of the umbrella reached certain Soviets...an umbrella was probably taken back to the Soviet Union by visiting Russian doctors."

PSR and the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War have regular physician-to-physician exchanges. "Twice a year, a group of Soviet MD's comes here and twice each year a group of American MD's travels there. The purpose of these exchanges is to discuss ways of lowering tensions between our two countries, and ways in which physicians can use their influence to end the arms race."

"Without firm persuasion by our Soviet colleagues, there never would have been a Soviet moratorium on nuclear testing over a year ago," said Frasz. "and we (the American physicians) have had a direct influence on the thinking of our Russian colleagues."

During exchange trips by the Soviets to the United States, Frasz said, it has become obvious to leaders in the PSR lobby that Russian doctors are uniformly familiar with three American influences in the effort avert a nuclear weapons build up.

One, said Frasz, is Samantha Smith, the Maine schoolgirl who gained international fame by writing to Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev in the name of world peace. The second is the paper lantern ceremony, staged annually on Aug. 6, in La Crosse Wisconsin, in memorium of the hundreds of thousands of Japanese citizens who perished in the bombing of Hiroshima. An identical ceremony is held the same day in Hiroshima by the families of victims and survivors of the world's first nuclear weapons attack. And thirdly, Soviet doctors are familiar with the "Star Wars" umbrella.

While the Frasz umbrella is attention-getting, the calculations behind its creation are most sobering. First Frasz said he assumed that the missile defense system will have to handle a small nuclear attack in the 2,000 megaton range, only one-third of the 6,000 megaton attack civil defense officials have used as a model for their planning.

Next, Frasz said, he allotted 90 percent of incoming nuclear explosives to military targets, leaving 200 megatons targeted on nearby urban areas. Finally Frasz said he assumed that "Star Wars" defenses block 95 percent of their missiles, "an optimistic figure which no proponents of the system actually claim."

"The remaining five percent (10 megatons) which would get through is still enough for one or two Hiroshima-sized bombs on every American city of any consequence, cities like Bangor, Waterville, Augusta. To sell this multi-billion dollar fiasco to the American public as a credible defense is irresponsible. It's political malpractice," Frasz stated.



RAIN GEAR? - Dr. David Frasz displays his original Star Wars umbrella in downtown Dover-Foxcroft. (Sawtelle)

Tax increase expected in county budget

PISCATAQUIS - The Piscataquis County Budget Committee met with County Commissioners Monday night for the first meeting on the proposed 1989 budget. This year's figures show an approximate 30 percent increase in taxation.

A total of \$1,476,343 is proposed in expenditures and revenues total \$435,623. Valuation for the county and unorganized territories is estimated at \$715.3 million, an increase of 23 percent over 1988.

Budget Committee members elected for the year were Paul Bridge, chairman; Paul Davis, vice chairman and

Nancy Cook, secretary.

Besides the officers, others attending the meeting were Hollis Nelson of Monson, David Kinney of Atkinson and Marilyn Bennett of Elliottsville. Others on the committee are Clifton Worthen of Guilford, Paul Bradeen of Milo and Charles Merrill of Dover-Foxcroft.

Commissioners present were Eben DeWitt, chairman; Gordon Andrews, and Joseph L. A. Morin. Clerk Carolyn Doore also attended.

The committee will meet again at the County Commissioners office on Tuesday, Oct. 25, at 6:30 p.m. to continue work on the budget.