

The exploding bathroom and the foamy T.P.



Bryant Lee is the owner of Qleanse, a Northbrook company that produces a toilet paper foam spray that reduces the need for pipe-clogging wet wipes. (Joe Lewnard | Staff Photographer)



Bryant Lee, who worked in marketing and business development at Baxter in Deerfield, made a "New Year's resolution" in 2020 to establish a side business and attack the problem of clogged sewers due to wet wipes. His concept was to turn toilet paper into a wet wipe. (Joe Lewnard | Staff Photographer)



Qleanse cleansing foam doesn't immediately break down toilet paper when sprayed on it. The hypoallergenic, ph-balanced foam is 99% naturally derived from plant-based ingredients. (Joe Lewnard | Staff Photographer)



Qleanse is a toilet paper foam spray that reduces the need for pipe-clogging wet wipes. (*Joe Lewnard | Staff Photographer*)



Bryant Lee, the owner of Qleanse, said the "most meaningful" feedback about his product has come from those who suffer from Crohn's disease or hemorrhoids, cancer patients and people undergoing radiation treatments. (*Joe Lewnard | Staff Photographer*)



One way or another, the entire Lee family -- Bryant and his wife, Angela, 2-year-old Trevor, Camden, 6, and Valerie, 5 on June 7 -- had a hand in creating Qleanse toilet paper spray.
(*PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRIS KIM/DOTEOGRAPHY*)

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Updated
6/2/2021 7:49 PM

It's a sensitive topic because, in part, it's a sensitive area.

No. 2 ways around it: Take an infant, a toddler and a preschooler, add countless "flushable" wipes sent down the toilet, and soon enough Bryant and Angela Lee had a disaster waiting to happen.

And it did.

The bottom line was a sewage backup in their home in Northbrook's Huntington subdivision that cost about \$50,000 to remediate.

"I wouldn't want to wish that on our worst enemy," Bryant Lee said.

Not to get too graphic, Lee said that, worldwide, 70% of the time water is incorporated in cleaning what he terms "arguably the body's dirtiest part."

Numerous sources have reported an increase in interest in bidets, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic arrived, which also had people buying toilet paper at doomsday prep capacity.

"People love their toilet paper," Lee said. "One thing we learned through the pandemic is people are not going to get rid of their toilet paper."

It's much more effective when damp, though -- like wipes. However soothing, convenient and effective, reliance on wipes to do the job takes a toll on the environment and both home and municipal plumbing systems.

A 2019 article on Undark.org quoted a worker in London, Ontario, who called wipes "kryptonite." The article noted a survey of 101 household products sold in Ontario that found only 17 of them disintegrated "to some degree" after lab testing.

The article, "Clogging the System: The Feud Over Flushable Wipes," said United States municipalities spend between \$500 million and \$1 billion annually clearing out pipes and underground systems and dealing with "fatbergs" -- congealed flushed items in sewers.

Less than two years later, this past March 26, a Bloomberg article cited a National Association of Clean Water Agencies statistic that said that figure was more than \$1 billion.

On its Facebook site in March 2020, the Village of Northbrook posted a message cautioning against flushing wipes and paper towels down the toilet.

Kelly Hamill, director of Northbrook Public Works, said most of the problems in the village occur with residential service lines. If nonbiodegradable materials get flushed, and the residential pipes are left unchecked, backups into a house may occur, as the Lees experienced.

"Anything you can do to lessen that, or anything that's more biodegradable, the better," Hamill said.

"Not only for private sewage lines, but also for community sewer lines and also, inevitably, for the MWRD (Metropolitan Water Reclamation District)."

The Lees didn't need further convincing after their calamity occurred about three years ago.

Bryant, who then worked in marketing and business development at Baxter in Deerfield, made a "New Year's resolution" in 2020 to establish a side business and attack the problem.

"We thought there must be a better way, and that's how we came up with Qleanse," he said. Last fall he converted his side business to a full-time pursuit.

Directly or indirectly, Bryant, Angela and their children -- Camden, 6; Valerie, 5 on June 7; and little 2-year-old Trevor -- all had an, um, hand in developing the product, which is available through qleanse.com, at Sunset Foods in Northbrook, and on Amazon.com.

His concept was to turn toilet paper into a wet wipe. That's done using the Qleanse cleansing foam that doesn't immediately break down toilet paper when sprayed on it. The hypoallergenic, ph-balanced foam is 99% naturally derived from plant-based ingredients.

Through his work with Baxter and Medtronic, and his experience in hospitals through those companies, Lee had contacts in chemistry, engineering and patenting, and soon he'd dedicated the Lee family dining room to the business.

"The pandemic helped because no one was visiting," he said.

He's since moved the business out of the home to an FDA-registered contract manufacturer in southwest Chicago and a packaging and distribution center in a Northbrook warehouse.

"It's a lot of work," Lee said. "But the biggest regret most people have is they never tried something. It's not necessarily that they failed, it's that they never tried."

Qleanse isn't only a salve to tender baby bottoms. Among the "tens of thousands" of people Lee said who have used the product, the "most meaningful" feedback has come from those who suffer from Crohn's disease or hemorrhoids, cancer patients and people undergoing radiation treatments.

"There's no doubt that my family and our customers love this product. It makes you much cleaner," Lee said.

One must use it to feel its benefits, of course.

A key to that, rather than stashing it out of sight and mind in the bathroom vanity, is an accompanying caddie holder for the bottle with a flexible cord that hangs from the existing toilet paper roll holder. A 50-milliliter bottle of foam spray provides the equivalent of 150 wipes; a 350 ml. refill container adds more than 1,000.

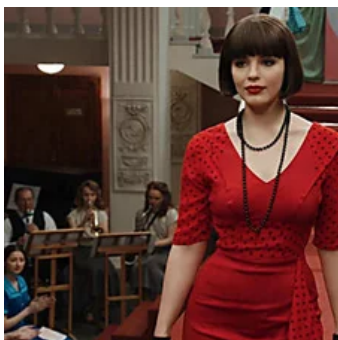
"It doesn't make sense to wipe dry, and that was exacerbated with my kids," Lee said.

Eventually, though, Camden, Valerie and Trevor were doing their part to battle the fatberg disaster.

"It's more a public service," Bryant Lee said. "One, to find a better way to wipe clean, and, two, save our sewers and save our planet and save our homes."

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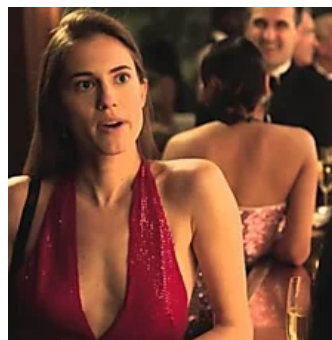
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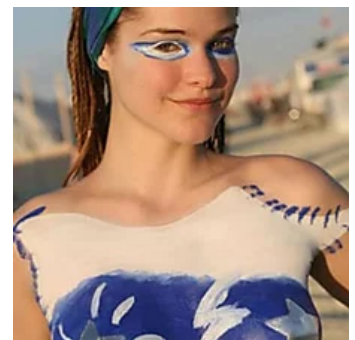
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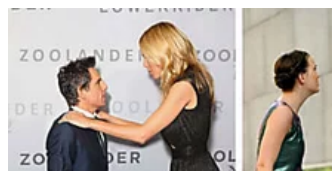
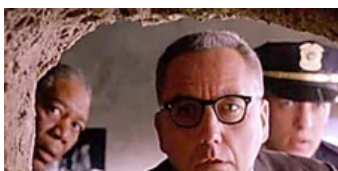
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