

TAXI

Advertising Firm Creates Newspaper-Insulated Coat for Homeless

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Taxi, an ad agency based in Toronto created the 15 Below initiative to create, manufacture and distribution a lightweight, waterproof cold-weather coat to the homeless. - Photography courtesy Taxi

Toronto-based ad agency Taxi is known for placing ads in newspapers, but now they want to turn that newsprint into a much-needed gift for the homeless. Partnering with designer Lida Baday, they have created an all-season coat insulated with newspaper.

Digital Journal — When Paul Lavoie, chairman of respected ad firm Taxi, brainstormed ideas to commemorate the company's 15th anniversary, he wanted to do something to change the world. Enter Steve Mykolyn, Taxi's Toronto executive creative director, who proposed this selfless idea: Why not create a thick coat ideal for those living on the street?

Mykolyn contacted a college friend, designer Lida Baday, and together they worked on an all-season lightweight weatherproof coat to be given free to the homeless across Canada and the U.S. Baday decided to insulate the coat with newsprint, which is the second most popular insulation material after fiberglass.

Newspaper is tightened into balls and stuffed into the coat pockets. The coat is made from Aquamax, a waterproof, breathable fabric laminated with a nonporous membrane. Mykolyn tried out the garment during an eight-hour test in a meat freezer, and stayed warm through temperatures that dipped as low as -29 degrees Celsius (-20.2 F).



The 15 Below coat is made from Aquamax, a waterproof, breathable fabric laminated with a nonporous membrane.

"I never felt cold, it was perfect," Mykolyn said in an interview with DigitalJournal.com. "I had to test it out, because as a creative director I'm the last signature on a piece of advertising, so I wanted to bring that same level of high standards to this coat."

Mykolyn said the coat is shipped as a small package along with a newspaper, so wearers can stuff the coat themselves as the weather gets chilly. The coat can also be worn without any newspaper stuffing during warmer months.

Lavoie said in a statement:

"These are a lifeline for people without homes. They're a pretty low-cost, immediate way to address a huge issue."

The coat is Taxi's inaugural objective for its 15 Below initiative, which is an agency-wide project to promote ideas that create significant change.

Taxi plans to spare that kind of change to the homeless in early 2008 — it plans to ship 3,000 coats in 2008 to cities where Taxi has set up shop, including Toronto, Calgary, Montreal, Vancouver, and New York.



Taxi's Toronto executive creative director tested the innovative coat in temperatures as low as -29 degrees Celsius (-20.2 F).

When asked if the all-season coat project was a PR stunt for the ad agency, Mykolyn scoffed at the notion.

"We did this so we can give something back. If brand promotion occurs, well, that's extra, but it was never the intent."

He went on to say that Taxi has always partnered with various humanitarian causes — Taxi's executives are on the board of directors for international shelter group Covenant House, and the firm has done pro-bono work for organizations like The Humane Society.

"There is growing trend with firms to come up with ideas that do more than just put ads out there," Mykolyn said. "People do it because they want to help and not because of publicity."

-By David Silverberg