

TAXI

Instead of Stuffing Stockings, Stuff Sleeves

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Taxi forgoes gifts for a holiday coat project.



Bady and Mykolyn, unstuffed

This holiday season, instead of presents and parties, Taxi's put its creative capital into a much brighter idea: helping keep the homeless warm.

The agency is behind the 15 Below Project, orchestrating the design, manufacture and distribution of a special winter coat to help those living outside in winter survive. The project comes from an idea Taxi ECD Steve Mykolyn contributed after chief creative officer Paul Lavoie called on agency creatives for innovations to tie in with the shop's 15th anniversary.

"The original idea was a jacket with 15 pockets that you stuff with newspapers," Mykolyn said. "How that was going to be done was anybody's guess."

Mykolyn called on womenswear designer Lida Baday, an old school friend of his, and the two worked back and forth to develop the prototype, with Mykolyn as mannequin. The coat has quite a few interesting features; it's made of a fabric called Aquamax and can double as rain gear, or fold into itself for carrying or use as a pillow and also features a zipper you won't catch your beard on, and is breathable and flame retardant. But the most interesting aspect is the insulation—the coat is designed to expand and be stuffed with balled-up newspaper, a process Mykolyn says takes 2-3 minutes on average, and when fully loaded can protect the wearer from freezing temperatures.

Mykolyn hung out in a meat freezer for over eight hours to test the model, cranking the temperature down to as low as -29 degrees Celsius to see how the well garment kept the cold out.



It's hard out there for a creative director. Mykolyn tests the coat in homeless-like conditions (except with an iPod).

"Up to that point it was just a good idea and a good looking piece of clothing," says Mykolyn. "Even with all of the research to prove that newspaper is a good insulator I couldn't be 100 percent sure unless I tested the jacket myself." But the gents who work in the meat freezer every day weren't expecting Mykolyn's coat to last. "About a week before I was going in I heard the entire staff was wagering, with the lowest being about 50 minutes —and that was the plant manager," he says. "When I got there they had a full blown pool going, with everyone participating. It was kind of intimidating, because these guys work there everyday, they wear arctic gear, two toques, mittens, boots, two giant heavy coats, dungarees, and there I was with this polyester coat stuffed with newspaper." Boredom proved more of an adversary than the temperature, however. "The first four hours I basically listened to my iPod and did jumping jacks, but I didn't get even slightly cold, so after four hours I took off my mid layer and I spent another four hours in there with only two layers and the coat," Mykolyn says. "I still didn't get cold, so for the last 45 minutes I agreed to go into the blast freezer, where they kept the ice cream. It's -29 degrees Celsius and -40 with the wind chill, because there's fans that run the entire time, so it's really cold. I spent 45 minutes in there before I thought You know what, the coat works, let me out. Now I know I can sign a P.O. That was on November 22nd, so I knew six months of design and thinking had paid off."

The coat will be manufactured by SG WICUS in Vietnam and distributed to around 3,000 homeless in cities where the agency operates, at Taxi's expense. "It's a really nice piece of clothing; it's something that anyone could wear," says Mykolyn. "In a perfect world, homeless people and others would be wearing the same coat."



-By Nick Parish