

## Losing a patent fight; recalling a battle with nature

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In 1988, the Czech native Taborsky was a research student at the University of South Florida when he hit upon a potentially lucrative discovery: a claylike substance in cat litter, he found, could be used to purify waste water when properly heated.

Then came the lawsuits. In 1989, USF claimed Taborsky took notebooks containing data about his discovery from their laboratory. They said since Taborsky was working under a research agreement between USF and Florida Progress Corp., the data wasn't his to take.

Taborsky was sentenced to probation, but when he was issued a patent on his discovery in 1992, a judge sent him to prison.

Between 1995 and 1997, Taborsky served 18 months in prison, including a stint on a chain gang. He refused a pardon from the governor because he said it would equate to an admission of guilt.

Now free from prison and probation, Taborsky, who politely declined to be interviewed, is living on Longboat Key and working as a computer software programmer, according to his patent attorney, Charles A. McClure.

For the most part, he appears to have put the case behind him.

"I don't recall any comment about the case from him in the last two or three years," McClure says. "As far as I can tell, he's not dwelling on it."

Other inventors, on the other hand, have spent years dissecting the now-infamous case.

Ronald Riley, founder of the Professional Inventors Alliance, says the case turned USF into a "black sheep" among research institutions.

"His case is most certainly legendary in the inventor community," Riley said. "I make damn sure that any inventor that I know that's looking to promote education knows about USF's role in this."

Hank Lavandera, a USF attorney who has worked on the Taborsky case since coming to the university

in 1993, said that most researchers and faculty that he has spoken to "were understanding of the situation and supportive of the university."

And what has become of Taborsky's research on waste treatment?

Shortly after Taborsky left USF, the university and Florida Progress Corp. terminated their research agreement. Taborsky's initial patent was signed over to USF, and Lavandera said USF research into waste treatment is ongoing.