

UW-Madison: Alum's mask makes TIME Magazine's list of best inventions of 2020

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MADISON - While studying abroad in Singapore as a University of Wisconsin-Madison mechanical engineering undergraduate student in 2013, Max Bock-Aronson experienced heightened levels of air pollution firsthand.

He also happened to be taking an engineering course on air pollution, where he was learning, among other things, about the mechanics of filtration.

"I was learning that the masks that people commonly wore in Southeast Asia, such as cloth masks and surgical masks, aren't actually very effective at filtration," he says. "So for dealing with poor air quality, these masks unfortunately don't provide much benefit."

On the other hand, the N95 masks that are highly effective at filtration can be uncomfortable, and Bock-Aronson didn't find them to fit seamlessly into his daily life.

"I didn't like the N95s. They looked so sterile. It made me feel like I was in a clinic," he says. "I wanted something that looked like a cotton mask and was a better fit for my lifestyle but that offered the protection of the N95 masks."

That initial idea was the genesis for what would eventually become the B2 Mask, an innovative, reusable face mask that is available for purchase from Breathe99, a Minneapolis-based startup company that Bock-Aronson co-founded.

Time Magazine selected the B2 Mask as one of the best inventions of 2020, a year when the COVID-19 pandemic thrust face masks into the spotlight as consumer

products.

Bock-Aronson says his UW-Madison engineering education, and the opportunities he capitalized on as a student, played a crucial role developing his entrepreneurial skills.