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## WD-40 to the Rescue

**How Shakespeare's Pizza saved a \$30 million press conference.**

*Story by Erik Potter*

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When you're getting ready to tell the world you've been given \$30.1 million, you want the press conference to look — and sound — good.

The donation, from the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation to MU's Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute (RJI), provides permanent funding for the institute's mission of conducting research to strengthen journalism. The endowment is the largest in MU history, and the

chancellor, former chancellor and UM president would be on hand for the Nov. 8 announcement, as well as media outlets from St. Louis to Kansas City.

So when it was discovered the night before that the motorized blinds in the conference room squeaked loudly as they were being lowered, Randy Picht, director of the RJI, knew he had a problem.



He needed to lower the shades to show a video about the RJI during the event, but he couldn't have them screeching for their 10-second trip to the floor.

“We thought, ‘Well, maybe if we lubricate them,’ ” Picht says. “So we decided we needed some WD-40.”

The WD-40 website offers more than 2,000 uses for the famous product. Although 191 of those

uses are related to stopping squeaks, quieting motorized blinds, if it worked, would be No. 192.

But where to find it on short notice?

Jeffery Beeson, BA '09, special events coordinator in the School of Journalism, was on it. Shakespeare's Pizza, just half a block away, has stocked WD-40 in its beer cooler since the early 1980s. They have a WD-40 button on the register, a listing on the menu, and even a handy punch line for why the popular oil solvent sits next to the Pabst Blue Ribbon: "It stays colder that way."

The strange tradition started when Shakespeare manager Kurt Mirtsching, BS BA '81, was spraying the stuff on the cooler's squeaky hinges. He saw a customer approach the counter and, lacking a better place to put the can, set it on the cooler shelf and promptly forgot about it.

Later that evening, a man came in and ordered — as Mirtsching imitates in a gruff voice — "a pizza, a pitcher of Budweiser, and, uh, a can of WD-40. Ha, ha."

Mirtsching didn't flinch, ringing in the pizza order, the beer and placing the WD-40 on the counter. Incredulous, the man said he didn't really want the can of oil and asked why the store would even sell it.

"I behaved as though it was the most natural thing in the world to keep in the cooler, which of course it's not," Mirtsching says. "We thought that was so funny we just left it there."

There are now WD-40 cans in all three Shakespeare's restaurants, and Mirtsching has included a page in the employee manual on how to go along with the joke without sounding stupid.

Sure enough, a can was waiting for Beeson on Nov. 7 when he walked into the restaurant, skipped the pizza and beer, and went straight for the WD-40.

And it worked. A quick spray to the blinds' mechanisms and the screeches were silenced.

Beeson isn't the only person to pick up the all-purpose oil from Shakespeare's. The cans are pretty good sellers; the downtown location goes through about 12 a month. But more than that, Mirtsching says, they're great icebreakers — another use not listed at [wd40.com](http://wd40.com).

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