

He's a real pal to parkers

By BILL BELL
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Not long ago, Louis Camporeale walked out of his house, in the Gravesend neighborhood of Brooklyn, to find a parking ticket on the windshield of his blue '87 Honda Civic.

It said that his car was parked in violation of a street-cleaning rule going into effect at 9 a.m. The time on the ticket was 9:01 a.m., but, Camporeale recalls, it was not yet 9.

He knew that cops and traffic agents sometimes jump the starting time on these tickets, and he knew that courts sometimes know this, too.

This was Camporeale's argument, which he won, saving \$45 and once again proving the little guy can win sometimes.

But, then, Camporeale says, the little guy can win more often than anybody ever believes — and the man runs a company that shows them how to do it.

And it's legit. He named it Parking Pal Co. Inc., which, as far as he knows, is the only motorist education company in the country. This, he says, is because nowhere else do car owners need as much help as they do in New York — the city's parking rules are maddeningly complicated and confusing.

Not only that, New York City motorists were ticketed 9.1 million times last year, and, Camporeale says, as many as one of every four tickets was invalid.

"One reason the city collects so much money in parking fines," he says, "is that motorists just pay up without checking to see if the ticket was written accurately."

This, he says, is anything from not filling out a ticket properly to issuing a ticket for a car parked at a broken meter.

Six years ago, he launched Parking Pal after a flash of inspiration in the law library at New York University, where he was taking a paralegal course.

"For some bizarre reason,"

he says, "I was interested in transportation, and I was reading about motorists who sued the city over fines for parking at broken meters."

"A light bulb went off," he says. Camporeale, a bachelor who turned 39 last week, began modestly, with three laminated placards for motorists to display on their windshields.

The placards stated that the car was parked at a broken meter, or on a street with defaced or missing signs; that the owner was a medical professional on duty, or that the vehicle was engaged in commercial delivery or pickup.

From that has grown a business with its own Web site (www.parkingpal.com), newsletter, calendar, seminars and "The New York City Motorists' Parking Survival Guide," a book Camporeale wrote to explain city parking rules.

He does not go to court to argue cases, but he has not ruled that out someday.

Nor does he advise parking illegally and then trying to get away with it. "It's important that you know your rights," he says, "but it's just as important to know the rules."

It was after Camporeale's car was ticketed several times during his student days at Brooklyn College that he became interested in parking rules.

"I always challenged the ticket," he says, "and usually won, and usually because the ticket was invalid."

Company's on a roll helping drivers beat tickets



Louis Camporeale

Camporeale majored in psychology and communications arts, added a master's degree in management, then went to work in sports marketing for the World Championship Tennis league. When it folded, he became a computer analyst for a bank.

He had toyed with the idea of becoming a lawyer, a career encouraged by his father, a retired chef, and his mother, who designs wedding millinery.

That's what took Camporeale to the NYU paralegal course, the law library and, bingo, Parking Pal. He still works as a paralegal, but he is gradually devoting full time to the company.

"Everybody said it was a silly idea," Camporeale says, "but I knew, I just knew, that this thing would work. As savvy as New Yorkers think they are, they are not really that bright when it comes to parking."

It's not just midtown and downtown Manhattan, either. Camporeale says some upscale residential neighborhoods — including Bayside, Queens; Brooklyn Heights and Park Slope in Brooklyn, and Manhattan's upper East Side — get socked with thousands of invalid tickets every year.

Camporeale, a Mets fan, likes to travel to other cities, but not to study parking rules there. He visits baseball stadiums. Left to go: Toronto and Montreal.

"I park my car on the street," he says, "and if I get a ticket that I deserve, I pay it. Hey, it's just a ticket, not a federal case."

TOP 10 REASONS YOU DON'T HAVE TO PAY

The top 10 defects on tickets that will lead to automatic dismissal by the courts:

- 1. FAILURE** to note time or date that officer or traffic agent noticed meter was expired.
- 2. FAILURE** to list date and/or exact time, to the minute, including "a.m." or "p.m.," when ticket is issued.
- 3. FAILURE** to give precise address or location where the vehicle was parked.
- 4. INCORRECT** or missing license plate number (and type), car make (and/or body type), state of registration and, for New Yorkers only, registration expiration date.
- 5. FAILURE** to list "a.m." or "p.m." and/or days and hours of violations of restrictions printed on signs, or to state "no" on various parking, standing or stopping signs.
- 6. FAILURE** to check appropriate "all" or "anytime" boxes.
- 7. FAILURE** to record parking meter number.
- 8. FAILURE** to record distance in feet from fire hydrant.
- 9. FAILURE**, in cases where drivers are personally handed a ticket, to ask driver for ID.
- 10. THE AGENT'S** name and/or signature is missing.