Intelligent Micro Patterning, LLC in the News
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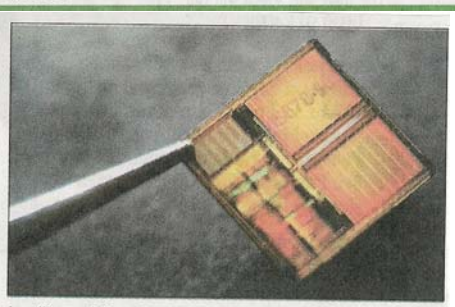
Believing in biotech

Though they aren't behemoths like Scripps Research Institute, three local companies are optimistic that Scripps' expansion into Florida will bring untold benefits to their businesses.



Intelligent Micro Patterning in St. Petersburg can make microdevices, such as minicircuit boards and sensors, with features as tiny as 1/20th the diameter of a human hair, like the numbers on this computer chip.

to 19 percent for competitors, he said. More than 2,100 of the company's screws have been used to repair hip fractures.

ODI's screw, made of stainless steel and in an assortment of sizes, sells for about $800, which Schaber said is similar to competitors' prices. This year, the company expects about $1-million in sales, but it is at least two years away from profitability.

"We plow all our money back into research and development," Schaber said. "We've got three engineers who are developing the adaptation of talons to devices used in total joint and knee replacements and other trauma products. Our product is just a new way of securing implants to bone."

By the end of the month, the company hopes to introduce its next product, a stainless steel nail that fits inside the bone, rather than attaches to the outside. Price for the nail, which requires less invasive surgery than existing implants, is about $1,600. The market is also less crowded, with only about a half-dozen competitors.

But building up inventory, developing new products and hiring salespeople doesn't come cheap. ODI, which has a dozen employees and 30 commission-based agents, is gearing up for another investment round, this time hoping to raise $7-million.

Early backers, such as Jabil Circuit chairman William Morean who owns 26 percent of the company, are expected to continue their support of ODI. Schaber thinks the improving economy and maybe even the Scripps' deal may help him close deals faster this time.

"I'm hoping maybe Scripps will bring a focus to Florida and to other companies like us," he said. "Whether you're tech or biotech, it doesn't seem to be the focus here. Last time, I heard lots of investors say, 'It's too bad you're not in California or Boston.' "

Intelligent Micro Patterning

In a cramped, second-floor office across from Williams Park in downtown St. Petersburg, Jay Sasserath and his three partners are building a biotech business.

Intelligent Micro Patterning LLC, started in July 2001, has all the ingredients for the kind of successful spinoff that politicians have been predicting will occur once Scripps Research Institute opens in Palm Beach.

It has patented technology, an experienced management team and customers in the biotech as well as the defense industry. But unlike Scripps, with its half-billion-dollar public funding, Intelligent Micro Patterning has been financed by its owners and has reached cash-flow positive without government or venture capital help.

The low-budget, bootstraps operation at Intelligent Micro is much more representative of how scientific research and development typically translates into a marketable product: with little glitz, lots of long-distance sales calls and plenty of long hours in the lab.

Intelligent Micro's focus is making microdevices, like minicircuit boards and sensors, with features as tiny as 1/20th the diameter of a human hair. The devices can be created on a variety of surfaces, from a glass microscope slide to the inside of a curved surface. Intelligent Micro's products are used by university biotech researchers to allow them to manipulate cells and DNA on microscopic levels. Other uses are as underwater sensors (hence their application to a curved, enclosed surface like a pingpong ball) and as microlenses in fiber optic networks.

Sasserath

Cost to develop and fabricate the devices ranges from $2,000 to more than six figures, Sasserath said.

Sasserath's partner, David Fries, developed the machine that uses a unique process to make the microdevices as a faculty member at the University of South Florida's Center for Ocean Technology in St. Petersburg. Though USF retains the patent on the machine, the company has exclusive global rights to sell microdevices made using the machine, as well as the machine itself.

Though sales of microdevices generated early revenue, equipment sales are becoming a bigger part of the business, Sasserath said. Eight have been sold and two systems are being constructed, one for a researcher at the University of North Carolina Medical School and the second for an unidentified defense contractor. The units, which are about 2 feet square and use a Windows-based computer and a special patented filter to produce the micro pattern, cost from $80,000 to $400,000 each.