

BK Products
named overall
Innovator
for energy
conservation

New Orleans
CITYBUSINESS

2008

Innovator of the Year

CityBusiness profiles innovative companies and nonprofits in New Orleans

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ON THE COVER: Bob Kuswa, founder of BK
Products, displays one of his company's air filters
that save energy in refrigerators and air conditioners,
keep the air cleaner and help produce last longer.
Photo by Frank Aymami

live



work

The excitement
is building.

The rebirth of
Tulane Avenue.



play



The Domain Companies is proud to introduce a new
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restaurants and shops complimenting Mid-City's rich
and unique history, our neighborhood is emerging as
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experience everything this great city has to offer.

shop



dine

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NEW ORLEANS

MERIDIAN
NEW ORLEANS

the
PRESERVE
NEW ORLEANS



PAST HONOREES

Innovator of the Year

2007

Innovators

Gold Award: SDT Waste and Debris Services LLC

Silver Award: Drivesoft LLC

Bronze Award: Diamond Data Systems Inc.

Advanced Imaging Solutions

Aqua2Go — Esgee Enterprises LLC

Barker Homes

The Biodiesel Resource

COMPAS Computerized Health System —

East Jefferson General Hospital

Crais Management Group LLC

E-Claim.com

The Equestrian Therapy Center of Slidell

Evertain

Frank Relle Photography

FutureProof LLC

Green Bean Foam Insulation

iSeatz.com

Laughing Buddha Nursery

Macromolecular Research — Tulane University

New Orleans Demolition Services

New Orleans Ice Cream Company

NPower Mobile

Ochsner Clinical Workstation — Ochsner

Health System

Omni Technologies

Piccadilly Food Services

Plaine Studios

qTrack — Ochsner Health System

sunglassengraving.com

TeAM Inc.

Transformyx

Trumpet Group

Tulane University Center for Gene Therapy

UAppoint Inc.

U.S. Flood Control

West Jefferson Behavioral Medicine Center

World's Healthiest Pizza

Innovative Investors

Brachytherapy cancer treatment — East

Jefferson General Hospital

Cardiovascular MRI — Ochsner Health System

Ci System — Touro Infirmary

da Vinci Robotic System — Ochsner Health

System

Gulf South Joint Replacement Center —

Touro Infirmary

Nathan Laser Institute

Reverse Shoulder Arthroplasty — Touro

Infirmary

64-slice CT scanner — Ochsner Health

System

Trilogy Cancer System — East Jefferson

General Hospital

Trilogy Cancer System — Ochsner Health

System

Nonprofits

Beacon of Hope Resource Center

IDEAcorps

The Idea Village

Louisiana Appleseed — Adams and

Reese/ConocoPhillips

New Schools for New Orleans

St. Anna's Episcopal Church

Stay Local, A Project of the Urban

Conservancy

On the Brink

Basin Street Station

Broadway South

GrayMatter Inc.

The Occasional Wife

RéVolve

SiteMighty.com

Tommye's Tiny Tots 2

2006

Innovators

Gold Award: Turbo Squid

Silver Award: Home Automation Inc.

Benjamin Taylor and Associates

Coastal Environments Inc.

DHAC Inc.

East Jefferson General Hospital

EzKee LLC

G.T. Michelli Company Inc.

HuckaBuck.com

International House

Intradel Corp.

IsoBreathing Inc.

Jones Walker

JPMorgan Chase

Just Scratch It!

KB Home/The Shaw Group

LuMunn LLC

Ochsner Health System

PreSonus Audio Electronics

Sabre Technical Services

West Jefferson Medical Center — Jefferson

Community Health Care Centers

West Jefferson Medical Center — Support

Services Facility and Energy Center

West Jefferson Medical Center — CyberKnife

Center

Education

Archbishop Rummel

Delgado Community College

Nonprofits

Katrina Krewe

Kingsley House

Operation Restoration

YOUTHanasia Foundation Inc.

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Touro Orthopaedic Surgeon and
Foot Care Specialist

Dr. Hernan Bazan
Touro Vascular Surgeon and
Endovascular Therapist

Touro Infirmary Patient
Comment System

Here. For Life.



www.touro.com



On the Brink

Duct Saddle
Thermo Faucets
LabOpsROI

2005

Innovators

Gold Award: Louisiana Casting Database

Silver Award: Engine Monitor Inc.

Bronze Award: Rattler Tools

American Scrapbooks LLC
The Darkroom
Electric Candle Co. Inc.
Go For Rent Inc.
Gulf Coast Bank & Trust Co.
inFront LLC
Javaflow
New Line Environmental Systems LLC
Parking Solutions LLC
PMO Link Inc.
P&O Ports
Technology Exchange
ThinPrint Inc.

Education

University of New Orleans

Nonprofits

Bounce for Life
Studio for Creative Design —
Tulane University

On the Brink

E-Z Time LLC
Hydraulic Industries LLC
Save our Wetlands Technic
Systems LLC

2004

Innovators

Gold Award: Laitram

Apogen
Bizzuka
Boudreaux's Butt Paste
Delta Queen Steamboat Co.
Chef John Folse & Co.
GeneScan USA
GT Energy LLC
Hibernia National Bank
LEI

Louisiana Production Capital
MD Technologies
National EMS Academy
Penta Corp.
P&R Accessories
Procter & Gamble
Urban Dog Magazine

Education

Charity School of Nursing — Delgado
Community College
Ecole Bilingue da la Nouvelle-Orléans
International Schools of Louisiana
Louisiana State University

Nonprofits

Audubon Center for Research of
Endangered Species
Exceptional Entrepreneurs of Louisiana
Jefferson Economic Development Commission
Louisiana Bucket Brigade
STARC

On the Brink

Bounce for Life

E-Z Time LLC
H&A Innovative Creations Inc.
Jazz Rio LLC
Johnson, Shields, Jackson Brown and
Associates LLC
Louisiana Casting LLC
Parking Solutions LLC
P&O Ports
RazorLine LLC
ThinPrint Inc.
We Care Designs LLC

2003

Innovators

Gold Award: MECO

Brint Custom Vision
Chicken Box
GCR & Associates Inc.
General Hearing Instruments Inc.
The Idea Village
Louisiana Institute of Film Technology
Metairie Small Animal Hospital
Neill Corp.
Patient Care
ReliaGene Technologies Inc.
Resurgence Software Inc.
Shadow Track Technologies Inc.

Education

Columbia Theatre and Fanfare Festival Program
— Southeastern Louisiana University
International Marketing Program — Delgado
Community College

On the Brink

Ghost Rider Pictures
GourmetFoodMall
The Interceptor

SEAtreat
Urban Dog Magazine
Yearbook Snapshots

2002

Innovators

Gold Award: New Orleans Coffee Co.
American LIFECARE
Autoimmune Technologies LLC
Dr. Nicolas Bazan — Louisiana State University
Neuroscience Center
CA Guitars Inc.
EDG Inc.
Integrate Inc.
Dr. Ronald Lemon — Louisiana State
University School of Dentistry
Levy-Rosenblum Institute for Entrepreneurship
Mele Printing
Richard Gray's Power Co.
Schools Leadership Center
Ship Simulator — Delgado Community College
Southern Candymakers

On the Brink

Dr. John Burgess
Burkenroad Reports at the A.B. Freeman
School of Business
Chao-Jun Li
E-commerce Service Providers Inc.
Kajun Kettle Foods Inc.
MakeBuZZ LLC
Micromaster Inc.
Pediatric Emergency Room — West Jefferson
Medical Center
State Farm Insurance/Xavier University
partnership
The Worley Cos.

CONGRATULATIONS INNOVATORS

FROM

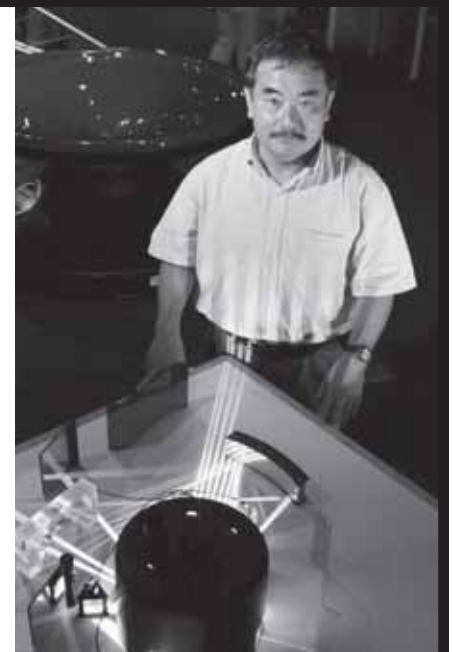


KEEPING IT CLEAN
IN METRO NEW ORLEANS

Congratulations to

Sanichiro Yoshida, Ph.D.

- 2008 CityBusiness Innovator of the Year
- 2008 Recipient of the President's Award for Excellence in Research Southeastern Louisiana University
- Inventor of the Deformation Prediction Instrument, using optical interferometry to measure weak spots in materials
- Scientific team member, LIGO Observatory, Livingston, La.
- Recognized as an accomplished teacher and mentor to students



*Congratulations to J. Monroe Laborde, M.D.
for being chosen as a*

New Orleans
CITYBUSINESS
Innovator
of the Year



Dr. Laborde independently developed the treatment of foot wounds with tendon lengthening. His publications document the success of this treatment which could prevent and delay most lower extremity amputations now being done.

ORTHOPAEDIC ASSOCIATES OF NEW ORLEANS

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2008
Innovator
of the Year

Introduction

Innovators favor eco-friendly, technology-based practices



Christian Moises
Associate Editor

GREEN IS THE COLOR of the 2008 Innovator of the Year program.

BK Products, the overall Innovator of the Year for its filters that save energy in refrigerators and air conditioners, keeps the air cleaner and helps produce last longer. Six other companies honored this year have made environmentally friendly practices the main focus of their business model.

Technology also continues to drive how New Orleans companies do business, with many of this year's honorees going to Web-based systems as their main way of interacting with clients.

Despite a flow of large businesses out of the area over the past several years, many new — and creative — companies have established roots in New Orleans.

New Orleans CityBusiness recognized 50 of those businesses in its 2008 Innovator of the Year program for their innovative products and services based on their forward thinking.

Criteria such as key innovation, years on the marketplace, 2007 sales and client base were considered in the selection process.

An increase in nominations over the 2007 program is very encouraging and proves New Orleans remains a creative place to foster new ideas.

Twenty-five Innovators are recognized this year for their proven success in the marketplace and their creative approach to business. They range from antique sales going high-tech to recycling frying oil for potato chips to save money and resources.

The eight honorees selected as Medical Innovators have either created new systems or invested in technologies to improve the region's health in the most cost-effective and least invasive ways possible.

Eight nonprofits were recognized for introducing methods to assist our area's unique culture. They allow people not only to thrive but to come together.

This year's nine On the Brink honorees have shown entrepreneurial hope and impressive starts. They are on the radar with the potential to have a profound impact on the business landscape.

CityBusiness honors each of them not only for their innovative contributions to the marketplace but for their commitment to the New Orleans area.

Congratulations to the 50 honorees of CityBusiness' Innovator of the Year 2008 program. •



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2008
Innovator
of the Year

GOLD AWARD

BK Products



PHOTO BY FRANK AYMANI

BK Products founder Bob Kuswa started creating air filters in 1996 to improve air quality, cut utility costs and remove odors.

Key innovation: commercial filters and products that save energy in refrigerators and air conditioners, keep the air cleaner and help produce last longer

Biggest clients: Holiday Inn, Wendy's, Piggly Wiggly Supermarkets

Where they're based: Madisonville

Top executive: Bob Kuswa, founder

Year introduced: 1996

MADISONVILLE-BASED BK PRODUCTS manufactures a number of air filters, including the Mega Fresh filter, which extends the shelf life of cold foods, and the Mega Freeze filter, which creates colder temperatures and better-tasting ice. The company's Awesome Air filters work with HVAC systems to improve indoor air quality and promote mold prevention.

From its humble beginnings in the garage of founder Bob

Kuswa, the company has grown to serve clients and customers worldwide.

BK Product's filters contain 100 percent all-natural blends of zeolite minerals, which have the ability to absorb and release water, odor and gas molecules without any chemical or physical change in the zeolite itself. The zeolites used in the products are non-flammable, non-toxic, can be recharged and never wear out. The company's filters can be regenerated by baking them in the oven for a couple of hours. While they've been effective in eliminating odors, they also dramatically reduce energy consumption.

"Bob invented the product years ago when no one was worried about energy savings," said BK Products President Clare Kuswa. "It wasn't a big deal back then, but today everyone is concerned about it. It lessens compressor run time and saves a lot of energy."

Formerly employed in the insurance industry, Kuswa tinkered with creating filters as a hobby 12 years ago. After a few experiments in his garage and satisfactory testing of the

filters, he obtained patents and trademarks and put his products on the market.

Awesome Air filter customers include Piggly Wiggly Supermarkets, Holiday Inn, Southern University at New Orleans, the University of New Orleans and the city of Covington. BK Products' filters also are used at Mandeville City Hall and promote better air quality and higher energy savings.

"Not only have we been delightfully cool in these last months but also according to our director of finance, we have saved over \$1,600 in the first four months of operation in the City Hall building alone," said Mandeville Mayor Eddie Price in a testimonial on BK Product's Web site.

Some of the company's other products include Flower Power, which can keep flowers fresh for up to 28 days; Odor Stop, which gets rid of smoke, grease and other odors by absorbing them; and Mega Cold, which eliminates fogging on reach-in coolers. •

— Craig Guillot



PHOTO BY FRANK AYMANI

Old New Orleans Rum General Manager Ben Gersh and CEO Heidi Redmon Raines sample their product.

SILVER AWARD

Old New Orleans Rum

2008
Innovator
of the Year

Key innovation: handcrafted, American rum
Biggest client: Republic Beverage Co. is the distributor
Where they're based: Lower 9th Ward
Top executive: James Michalopoulos, owner and president
Year introduced: 1995
2007 sales: 2008 year-to-date sales show an increase of 66.7 percent over 2007 year-to-date sales, which were 30 percent more than 2006 sales

OLD NEW ORLEANS Rum, like the city it is named for, is rich in complexity and flavor. The handcrafted rum recently took several awards at the 2008 International Rum festival, capturing worldwide attention.

Owner and President James Michalopoulos, a local artist, became enamored with the idea of making his own rum after he sampled a friend's homemade spirits. After two years of perfecting the engineering of his still, ingre-

dients and the distillation process, Michalopoulos put his product on the market in 1995. Every part of the process reflects the attention to detail of an artist, which from the beginning has distinguished Old New Orleans Rum from mass-produced spirits, said Ben Gersh, managing director.

"We have engineered a perfume still into a double distillation pot and column that gives us a purer alcohol with a more complex flavor profile," Gersh said. "Most people either use one or the other. Many distillers add the rum flavors at the end, but my secret is through the process. Everything is done by hand, the traditional way."

And Old New Orleans Rum uses only the freshest, Louisiana-made ingredients.

Using molasses, instead of refined sugar, and fresh herbs and spices in the distillation process rather than adding them at the end contribute to Old New Orleans Rum's unique flavor.

"Rum is the hardest to make of all the spirits," Gersh said, and not something that is typically embraced by

American distilleries. As young as it is, Old New Orleans Rum boasts being the oldest rum distillery in the United States in continuous operation.

Old New Orleans Rum has proved itself on the international scene, too, winning the gold medal for its Crystal rum, the silver for Cajun Spice and Amber rums and the bronze for its 10 Year limited release at the 2008 International Rum festival held in January in Tampa, Fla.

The company's Cajun Spice also has received the highest market rating by the Beverage Tasting Institute the past two years.

Old New Orleans Rum is now distributed in 11 states and has grown from selling a couple hundred cases a year to more than 9,000 cases from August 2007 to August 2008, Gersh said.

"We have sold almost 600 cases in Kentucky since December. To be able to say you are selling rum in Kentucky, you must be doing something right."•

— Angelle Bergeron

The Receivables Exchange

Key innovation: an online capital market for buying, selling and trading commercial receivables for private companies

Where they're based: New Orleans

Top executive: Justin Brownhill, CEO and co-founder; Nic Perkin, president and co-founder

Year introduced: 2008

JUSTIN BROWNHILL AND Nic Perkin have taken huge steps toward putting the Crescent City on the same financial map as Chicago and New York.

With the creation of The Receivables Exchange, the two men opened a marketplace where small- and medium-sized businesses can gain access to working capital by buying, selling and trading assets.

"The system works much like the New York Stock Exchange, but for privately held entities," said Receivables Exchange president Perkin. "The sellers are small companies that sell their assets online and the buyers are hedge funds and family offices looking at receivables as equity."

Where Perkin envisioned the idea of modernizing accounts receivable, Brownhill, co-founder and CEO, conceptualized the exchange. Brownhill drew from his experience in exchange strategy and trading technology to structure a marketplace where accounts receivable could be funded and traded like other assets on an exchange.

Perkin said the exchange is one-of-a-kind in that it is the only marketplace that is completely electronic — every transaction is performed online.

"It allows quick access to working capital," Perkin said. "It is also very diverse in that it is not 'all or none.' Clients can buy a portion of a company's receivables and not have to put all their money in one place."

The Receivables Exchange runs on the same technology that powers the New York Stock Exchange's electronic bond trading system. The technology and security measures backing the exchange's engine and Web site provide safeguards that allow for the secure electronic transfer of corporate and account information for trading receivables.

Perkin said he was drawn to the New Orleans market after living in the city for four years while he pursued a bachelor's degree from Tulane University.

"I always dreamed of coming back to the city, but I had to find the right opportunity," Perkin said. "We spent a lot of time looking for a major city to house the exchange and as we dug deeper we determined that New Orleans, with its low cost of living and connection to institutions, was a great fit for us. It was a location outside of normal financial hubs. We have had great luck so far." •

— Robin Shannon



Nic Perkin, president and co-founder of The Receivables Exchange, has created a receivables system with CEO and co-founder Justin Brownhill that allows businesses to place their accounts receivable on an online trading block.

A-Y2K Marine Survey

Key innovation: surveyor of marine vessels and oyster boats for safety
Biggest client: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Where they're based: New Orleans
Top executive: Willie Tuggle, owner and operator
Year introduced: 2000

ATTEMPTING TO MANEUVER large waterways in any sort of sea vessel can be a tremendous undertaking. The slightest chink in the armor has the potential to endanger not just the cargo being carried but also the lives of the crew manning the boat.

Willie Tuggle, owner and operator of A-Y2K Marine Survey of New Orleans, is one of the few people in the Crescent City responsible for ensuring the safety of these large watercrafts.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency chose A-Y2K Marine in February to survey oyster boats, signaling the first time the USDA has chosen a marine surveyor to take on this task.

"It says a lot for our experience and our quality," Tuggle said. "I feel blessed every day."

A veteran of the U.S. Coast Guard, Tuggle said he understands what to look for when inspecting ships for water travel. He uses that expertise daily.

"The Coast Guard needs help, they can't catch everything," Tuggle said. "That is where A-Y2K comes in. We look at every aspect of a vessel from the top down. Even the crew gets a once over to make sure they are capable of manning the ship."

Tuggle said he is only the third Coast Guard veteran to go through the Chapman School of Seamanship's Marine Surveyor Class, the premier school for the work he performs.

Tuggle said a basic definition of marine survey is checking the condition of any mobile unit on the water for value and safety.

"We look for stress fractures, malfunctioning parts or anything that could pose a threat to environmental or personal safety," Tuggle said. "Each inspection produces specific findings and based on those findings, we determine if a ship is in good shape or needs work. We can come back with a ruling that says the vessel needs a little attention, but we can also say that a craft can be shut down until immediate improvements are made."

Tuggle said A-Y2K is staying local at this time, but there are plans to take the company nationwide.

"There are opportunities everywhere to inspect the safety of vessels, and I'd like to be the one inspecting them," Tuggle said. •

— Robin Shannon



The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency selected Willie Tuggle's A-Y2K Marine Survey in February to inspect oyster boats for safety.



PHOTO BY TRACIE MORRIS SCHAEFER

Bruce Hoffman, geologist and senior project manger with Alternative Energy Group, helps Jeff Hill, left, and Rock Hill lay pipes for a Make It Right home in the Lower 9th Ward.

Alternative Energy Group

Key innovation: umbrella company that installs geothermal and solar energy systems
Biggest client: Make It Right Foundation
Where they're based: Slidell
Top executive: Bruce Hoffman, geologist and senior project manager
Year introduced: July 2008

FOR THE EMPLOYEES of Slidell-based Alternative Energy Group, equipping six houses in the 9th Ward with energy-efficient technology within a few weeks, and before the third anniversary of Hurricane Katrina on Aug. 29, was something to be proud of.

They truly had bragging rights, however, when the houses stood nearly untouched after Hurricane Gustav.

Brad Pitt's Make It Right Foundation hired AEG to install the heating, cooling and power systems in the strip of houses along Tennessee Street. The system decreases the average price of utilities up to 70 percent.

AEG uses geothermal technology to heat and cool every room.

"We use the earth as the heating source and the cooling source for the air conditioning," said Bruce Hoffman, geologist and senior project manager. "So instead of having an outside air compressor, we actually use the loops in the ground to heat and cool the systems inside the house. ... It captures the temperature of the earth, so when it comes back into the house, it's 70 degrees."

Hoffman said the damage was extremely minimal after Gustav, and he's glad Make It Right could prove itself.

This technology isn't new, and it's not AEG's innovation. However, they are the leading energy-efficient group in the New Orleans area because AEG is an umbrella company that consists of two drilling companies, an installation company, a duct group and an engineer, not to mention business development and administration.

Make It Right's engineering group contacted Hoffman because, "I'm basically doing the complete service," he said, "as opposed to other companies that would end up

bringing in one company to drill the wells, one company to tie the wells in, one company to put in the duct work, one company to put in the air conditioning system," AEG handles everything.

"It has to be a compatible system," he said. "You can't have one without the other. I can put in a geothermal system, but if the house has leaks, at the end of the day I'm not helping you."

And AEG is interested in helping people: Hoffman stresses these systems are affordable to just about everyone.

"If people incorporate (geothermal energy) into their (rebuilding) loan," he said, "their monthly rates are going to be about \$8 to \$12 per month. Where the savings comes in is that every month they're going to experience a 60 (percent) to 70 percent decrease in their utilities."

And after withstanding the threat of a hurricane, AEG is able to bring a whole new meaning to the term "sustainable."•

— Katie Urbaszewski



PHOTO BY SHANNON DIECIDE

The Art Station owner and director Kim Zabbia reviews a piece of art with students, from left, Mary Lavigne, Diana Pilcher and Judy Nesser.

The Art Station

Key innovation: providing art classes for adults
Biggest client: local and regional professionals seeking to explore the arts
Where they're based: Ponchatoula
Top executive: Kim Zabbia, owner and director
Year introduced: 2007
2007 sales: about \$5,000 to \$8,000 monthly

JUST SLIGHTLY MORE than a year since its official opening, The Art Station in downtown Ponchatoula has become a sanctuary for high-pressured, overworked professionals looking for a way to express themselves creatively.

"We have nurses, CPAs, lawyers, judges and doctors who come here on a regular basis," said Kim Zabbia of The Art Station's more than 650 registrants, "not to

mention housewives who have spent their entire day with their children and just need a break."

Zabbia, owner and director of The Art Station, taught art at Ponchatoula High School for about three decades before retiring with the idea that local adults might be well-served by a facility that not only offers an array of art classes but also provides an opportunity to meet similarly inclined adults in an artistic environment.

"It is very much a place to go to learn about the arts and be a part of them," said Lucille Griffin, who has taken about 16 classes in a variety of disciplines at The Art Station. "But it really also provides a kind of emotional outlet where you can meet and talk with other people who share your interests. I look at it as a very welcome place that takes me out of my daily routine."

Offering classes from traditional watercolors to Impressionist painting, knitting, interior decorating and digital photography, The Art Station's clientele is not

typically students interested in pursuing art as a career.

"The kind of people who are most likely to come here are those who want to just learn about drawing or working with clay, and have a good time," Zabbia said. "Although we have had professionals come in who want to experiment in another medium: photographers who want to try clay, graphic designers who want to paint."

With classes varying in size "from 20 to as few as two," Zabbia said, The Art Station has attracted students ranging in age from 18 to 85.

"I have seen the loyalty part in the number of people who wanted to donate money to us but could not count it on their taxes because we are a business," Zabbia said. "So in response we formed the Friends of The Art Station, which is designed to raise money for adult scholarships for those who want to come here but may not be able to afford it."•

— Garry Boulard

Bull Sweeper SDT Waste & Debris Services

Key innovation: the Bull Sweeper is a compact suction sweeper that can vacuum leaves and trash in tight spaces along sidewalks or streets
Biggest client: city of New Orleans
Where they're based: offices in New Orleans, Chalmette and Jefferson Parish
Top executive: Sidney Torres, president
Year introduced: 2008
2007 company sales: \$28 million

SIDNEY D. TORRES IV, president of SDT Waste and Debris Services, is helping to alter the stereotype of New Orleans from that of a dirty city to one that employs innovative means to keep the streets clean.

One way they are doing this is with the Bull Sweeper, which the company introduced for Jazz Fest.

"The Bull Sweeper is designed to be more efficient and effective to clean the sidewalks of the city," Torres said. "It is small and compact and able to clean areas that SDT's larger equipment can't reach. It allows us to do an even better job of keeping New Orleans clean."

About as small as a Smart car, the machine is a compact suction sweeper that can vacuum leaves and trash in tight spaces along sidewalks or streets, particularly in the French Quarter. It also partners with SDT's bull washer, which pressure washes sidewalks.

Other popular SDT inventions introduced at the 2008 New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival were the VIP comfort stations, or air-conditioned trailers that house bathrooms.

"The comfort station addresses the dilemma at festivals, weddings and other outdoor social events for the need for a comfortable restroom," Torres said. "It features the music of your choice, airconditioner and is clean and comfortable."

Two of these stations at Jazz Fest were equipped with granite countertops.

Since 2005, the Chalmette native has opened offices in Chalmette, Jefferson Parish and New Orleans, where he lives. SDT began in the days after Katrina when Torres, like many New Orleanians, needed a Dumpster. But, the post-storm price was triple what it had been pre-Katrina. Torres decided to rent a truck, purchased a few 30-yard roll-off containers and put his initials and logo on the side.

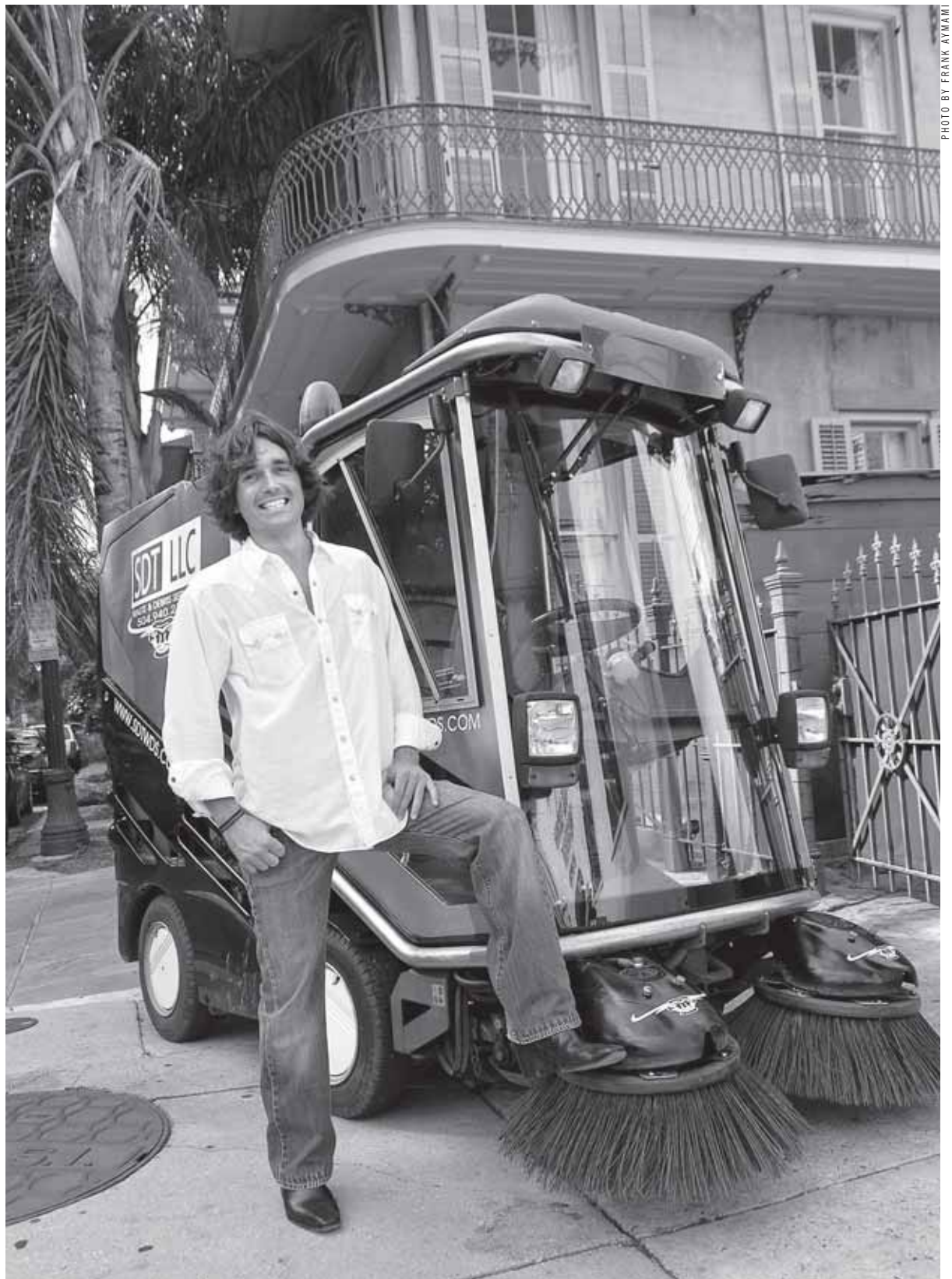
"Three years later, we are doing business all over south Louisiana and are the largest waste provider to schools in Louisiana."

His innovations, he said, are the result of his efforts to always find better ways in which to do his job.

"The Bull Sweeper has enabled us to clean decades of dirt and grime in the Quarter," he said. "It's a tool we use in addition to power washing the Quarter with lemon-scented disinfectant, regular garbage pickup and sweeping."

As for the comfort station, he said, it has set the standard for mobile restrooms. •

— Amy Ferrara Smith



Sidney Torres, president of SDT Waste and Debris Services, had the Bull Sweeper created to more efficiently clean the city's sidewalks.

PHOTO BY FRANK AYAMAMI

CommTech Industries

Key innovation: SMB 4.0 system, which offers information technology planning and management, project management, and ongoing technical support as well as troubleshooting

Biggest clients: the public sector as well as the hospitality and health care industries

Where they're based: New Orleans

Top executive: Darryl d'Aquin, president and founder

Year introduced: 1991

FOR MORE THAN 15 years, CommTech Industries has been integrating communications systems for the public sector and the health care and hospitality industries — large entities requiring extensive support.

But in the weeks after Hurricane Katrina, Darryl d'Aquin, CommTech president and founder, realized

smaller businesses were in need of the same kind of systems integration — although they usually didn't have it.

"We had actually been thinking about something like this before, but Katrina was the catalyst for us to expedite this particular offering," d'Aquin said. "It just became so obvious to us in the weeks after the storm that a business did not have to be a big company in order to be in need of advanced IT planning."

In response, CommTech has launched an ambitious new service geared especially to small and medium businesses called SMB 4.0.

"It really addresses a need that no one has addressed before," said Dan Henderson, CommTech director of marketing. "Before it was just assumed that only the biggest companies would want and use something like this. Now we are finding that just the opposite is the case — businesses of any size can very much use this sort of a service."

Providing routine IT operations, SMB 4.0 also offers

information technology planning and management, project management, and ongoing technical support as well as troubleshooting.

"It is a full package, the kind that would be offered to larger businesses, only in this case as a packaged service, which makes it affordable to smaller companies," Henderson said.

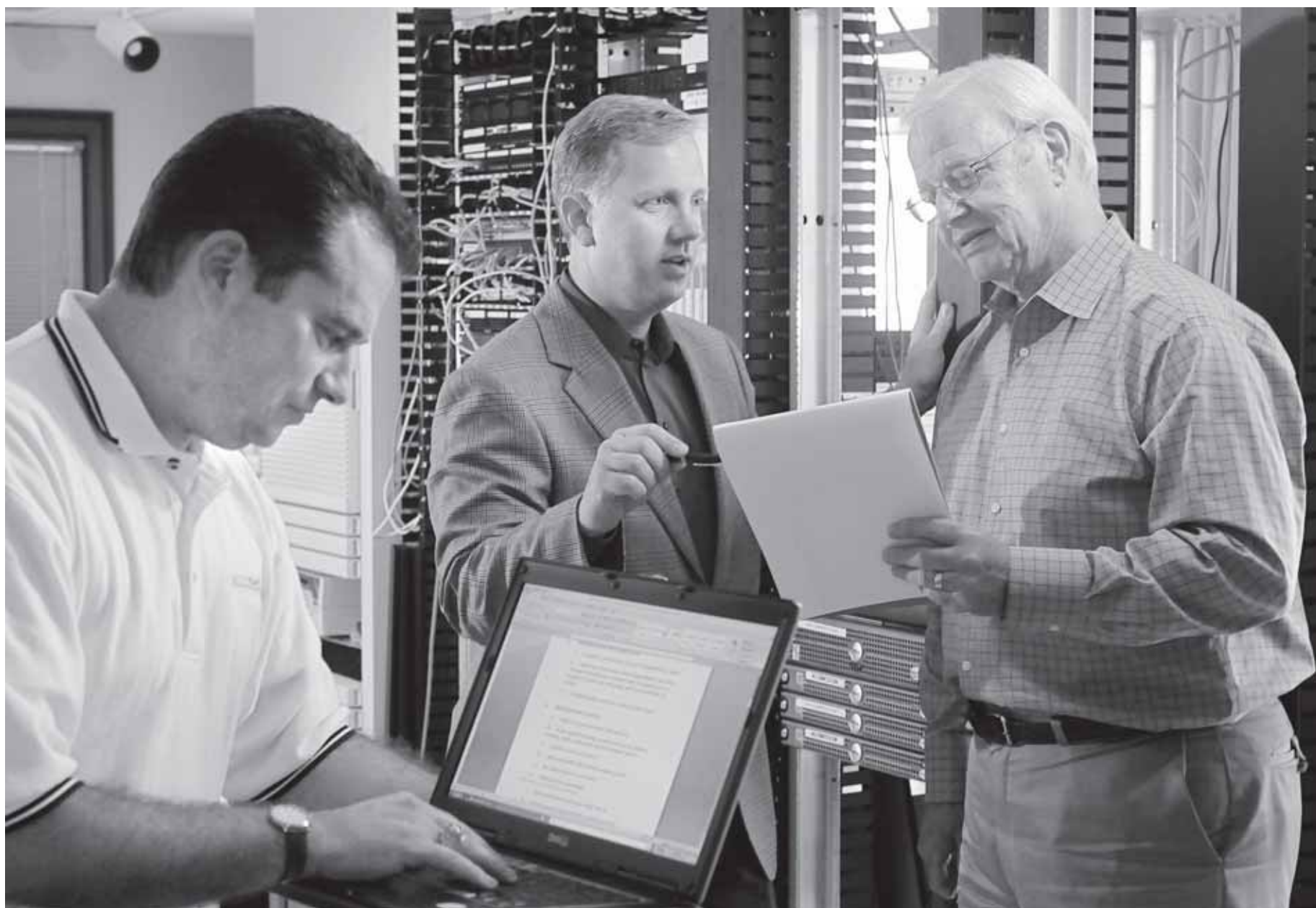
And the emphasis remains on reliability.

"We wanted to put together a service that has all of the regular ongoing operations of any system but is still able to deal with a variety of projects as well as the unintended incidences and failures and things that break," d'Aquin said. "And coming up with a four-point plan that was also cost-effective for a smaller business was what allowed us to do all of that."

Henderson points out that because the SMB 4.0 is a new product, it is being used by only a handful of clients.

"But there is no doubt in our mind that this is going to take off, and very soon," he said. •

— Garry Boulard



CommTech Industries President Darryl d'Aquin, center, reviews procedures with business development director Dan Henderson, left, and director of product solutions Charles Smith.

The Domain Cos.

Key innovation: mixed-use apartments and retail space
Biggest clients: renters of affordable-to market value-housing
Where they're based: New York and New Orleans
Top executives: Chris Papamichael and Matt Schwartz, co-founders and principals
Year introduced: 2003 in New York, 2005 in New Orleans

LOCATED IN THE geographic center of New Orleans, Tulane Avenue may soon be the economic and social center as well.

At least that's the plan of Chris Papamichael and Matt Schwartz, co-founders of The Domain Cos., the private development company responsible for inciting the "rebirth" of the Mid-City drag.

Shortly after Hurricane Katrina, Papamichael and Schwartz, graduates of Tulane University's Freeman School of Business, began looking for an area to build mixed-used apartment and retail spaces.

"From a land planning perspective, it makes perfect sense to be on Tulane Avenue, with its access to everything and the high-density development that we're doing," Papamichael said. "We're pioneering in that we are some of the first projects to get under way. With everything planned, you're going to see Tulane Avenue transform very quickly over the next few years."

The Domain Cos. is also working to renovate some of the area's historic homes to polish up existing neighborhood structures.

Papamichael believes the product will appeal, and be accessible, to a wide range of people in New Orleans.

"Our product really hits a very broad income band, with the type of financing that we have. We have market-rate units, as well as affordable units, so it really hits a good cross section of the New Orleans population," he said.

The Domain Cos. has four buildings under construction along Tulane Avenue, two of which will be completed and begin leasing at the end of this year; the other two, by early 2009.

Papamichael added that the company incorporates green building practices into all of its new and renovated buildings.

"We're doing everything we can to make this a green building and energy efficient design. All of the appliances and lighting is Energy Star-rated," he said.

In addition to its central location, Papamichael said Tulane Avenue was also appealing because of some of the other development planned in the area.

"The vehicle for economic growth in New Orleans moving forward, to diversify the economic base, is centered around everything that's happening on Tulane Avenue," Papamichael said. "Among all the developments between the medical centers, the potential criminal justice center that the city is working on, and everything else that going on, there's probably \$2.5 (billion) to \$3 billion of planned or under construction on Tulane Avenue."•

— Leah Bartos



PHOTO COURTESY BEUERMAN MILLER FITZGERALD

The Domain Cos. partners Matthew Schwartz, left, and Chris Papamichael stand on the site of the Crescent Club, a 228-unit apartment complex on Tulane Avenue.

Express Lien

Key innovation: a more affordable and efficient way to file construction liens

Where they're based: New Orleans and Seattle

Top executive: Scott Wolfe, founder and CEO

Year introduced: June 2007

SCOTT WOLFE WANTS TO revolutionize the way people file liens.

After devising a way to streamline the process, the New Orleans attorney and entrepreneur launched Express Lien in 2007.

Construction projects involve hundreds of parties. As a result, people don't always get paid for their work.

The person or company can file a lien on the property to prevent it from being sold, transferred or refinanced until all work is paid for.

"It's a big thing and it's been around forever," Wolfe said of liens.

In the past, filing a lien meant hiring a lawyer and paying that person by the hour for their services — an expense that adds up quickly.

Express Lien allows customers to instead pay a flat rate of \$295 to have the lien filed online. If an attorney is needed later, the customer can hire one separately.

Customers say they appreciate Express Lien's affordability and efficiency.

"It only takes a few minutes to do, and it is at a very reasonable cost," said Tiffany Comardelle of St. Rose-based Bottom Line Equipment. "You do it online so you don't have to waste any time, gas and money to drive to an attorney and pay a few hundred dollars to give them paperwork."

That's especially helpful since filing a lien is often more effective than an angry letter, Comardelle said.

"After a customer would hear that a lien was filed, they would drop what they were doing to cut us a check," she said.

Express Lien offers services in Louisiana, Georgia, Mississippi, California, Nevada, Oregon, Utah and Washington.

"The demand was pretty high, so we slowed down (expansion) a bit," Wolfe said. He hopes to expand to all 50 states and is working on offering services in Brazil and Canada.

He also wants to expand into doing all kinds of legal documents for construction cases at a flat fee of \$125 each. •

— Fritz Esker



Express Lien founder and CEO Scott Wolfe has expanded the company's services to Georgia, Mississippi, California, Nevada, Oregon, Utah and Washington, with plans for Brazil and Canada.

Even Edison Would Be Proud

*"Genius is one percent inspiration
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– Thomas Edison

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PHOTO COURTESY SLIDELL MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Acadian Ambulance Paramedic Kenny Campbell teaches camper Gabrielle Guillory, right, to bandage the arm of an “injured” Jonathan Dunn.

Fit as a Firefighter

Slidell Memorial Hospital and St. Tammany Fire District 1

Key innovation: fitness camp for kids that uses training methods for firefighters and National Guardsmen

Where they're based: Slidell

Top executive: Michelle Partridge, Slidell Memorial Hospital director of women's and children's services, and Larry Hess, St. Tammany District 1 fire chief

Year introduced: summer 2007

CHILDHOOD OBESITY is a growing problem nationwide, but the situation is unique in the New Orleans area.

In a post-Katrina environment where many children still live in trailers, a large percentage of parks and playgrounds remain unrepaired and depression is more prevalent, the struggle against obesity can be even harder.

That's what Michelle Partridge from Slidell Memorial Hospital and St. Tammany District 1 Fire Chief Larry

Hess had in mind when they decided to use their combined resources to create a fitness camp for children.

For the past two summers, these two public service corporations, with help from Cross Gates Athletic Club, have managed and sponsored Fit as a Firefighter, a day camp for children between 7 and 12 years old located at the Louisiana National Guard Training Camp. A typical day can consist of exploring the inside of a Black Hawk Helicopter, meeting the Slidell Police Department SWAT Team, line dancing, Taekwondo and nutrition classes.

“They did a bucket brigade relay where they have two pails of water filled halfway up,” Hess said. “They’ve got to lift them up, and they’ve got to move them a certain distance and put out a pretend fire. Now they’re up, they’re moving, they’re running, they’re carrying weights and it stays that way all day long. ... We hide the exercises in games.”

In addition to volunteers from Cross Gates, the hospi-

tal and the community, the camp is also staffed by firefighters and National Guardsmen.

“They’ll get this relationship with people that ... are seen as role models,” Hess said. “Every little kid wants to be a firefighter.”

The weeklong calendar is not the ordinary fitness camp schedule. Activities include Fire Fighters K9 Search and Rescue Chase, Repelling Team Demo and Tower Run and Black Hawk Helicopter. Camp activities are a combination of demonstration and participation.

The camp had 63 participants in 2007 and expanded to 85 this year, with a waiting list of 100. The camp is looking to extend its time to two weeks to accommodate more campers.

“We’re able to accomplish a more overarching purpose for the people we serve,” Hess said. “It might not be as heroic as running into a burning building, but it is saving lives and it’s making a difference.”•

— Katie Urbaszewski



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Photograph by Mike Walters



PHOTO BY FRANK AYMANI

GreenStar Coatings and Recycling president and founder David Lamouranne has provided roof guards for several McDonald's in the region.

GreenStar Coatings and Recycling

Key innovation: applying window films and roofs that provide energy efficiency and security
Biggest client: McDonald's
Where they're based: Harahan
Top executive: David Lamouranne, president and founder
Year introduced: 2006
2007 sales: \$78,000

IT TOOK GREENSTAR two years to convince McDonald's to try out its energy-efficient technology.

They started with an owner-operator in Houma by coating the building's asphalt roof with a wind-breaking, heat-reflecting, impervious seal, and they applied films to the windows as well.

"The difference here is we're cutting down substantially how much air conditioning they use," said David Lamouranne, president and founder, estimating a 50 percent decrease in heat through the windows and a 40 per-

cent decrease through the roof.

They also painted the building inside and out with low-volatile organic compound paint, which doesn't emit as many chemicals into the air.

"It's my basic three win-win-win strategy," Lamouranne said. "It's good for the environment, it's good for the business owner and it's good for GreenStar. We're profitable at it."

Although GreenStar has worked on similar renovation projects, such as at Le Pavillion Hotel in the Central Business District, Lamouranne is most proud of the work on McDonald's.

"If you're on the level of McDonald's, I get to set the bar," he said.

The films and roof guards also offer protection from storms. Neither the Houma McDonald's nor the McDonald's in Luling, which GreenStar renovated for a corporate request, were harmed in Hurricane Gustav.

The roof coating actually binds the shingles down and forms a solid, one-piece surface.

"It basically shrink-wraps everything down, and it's

sealed," he said.

GreenStar uses Energy Star-approved products manufactured by 3M, a company that supplies various technology to homes and offices.

"I don't want to do something to say it's green and not be green," Lamouranne said. "Say I have a product that's green, but the company that makes it is so wasteful that it negates it. So we make sure our products are efficient."

GreenStar's trucks and cars also run off of a clean fuel system Lamouranne designed — an engine that runs off vegetable oil.

Lamouranne has also been pushing for McDonald's to adopt his idea for a generator that runs off waste from the restaurant, a concept he said can become a reality based on his vegetable oil-engine model.

"I have an operator who's interested. But if you can imagine it took me two years to get McDonald's to go green on a roof, and we know that works, I'm just forecasting that it's going to take me a bit longer to put together a plan like this. •

— Katie Urbaszewski

Imagination Movers

Key innovation: interactive and educational entertainment for kids

Where they're based: Harahan

Top executive: Rich Collins, Scott Durbin, Dave Poche and Scott "Smitty" Smith, executive producers

Year introduced: 2003

THE IMAGINATION MOVERS began six years ago as a group of four New Orleans dads who liked to make up songs and silly antics to entertain their kids.

That's when journalist Rich Collins, elementary school teacher Scott Durbin, architect Dave Poche and New Orleans fireman Scott "Smitty" Smith started kicking around the idea of creating their own musical TV show. Living a few blocks from one another in the Mid-City/Lakeview area, they gathered at each other's homes to write songs late at night after putting the kids to bed.

"There were probably a half dozen songs that were born within a month of us starting to think about this project," said Collins, a former managing editor of *Gambit*, who played several instruments in high school and college bands in the Washington, D.C., area before moving to New Orleans.

When they started performing some of their material in concerts, they had no idea they were about to become genuine national rock stars. With their trademark blue coveralls, trashcan drums, rock and roll vibe, and interactive elements, their performances are a hit with kids and parents.

Their big break came when a Disney executive caught their act at Jazz Fest. On Sept. 6, 2008, they finally realized the dream that has driven their success all along, when the "Imagination Movers" television series premiered on the Disney Channel.

All four members star in the show and serve as its co-executive producers. About 100 local crewmembers are on the set at the Harahan production studio. In negotiating the deal with Disney, the group insisted on keeping the project local so they could pay back the community for its longtime support.

"When we decided to buy these blue polyester jumpsuits and start singing about snacks and naps, our friends, families, colleagues — the entire city, basically — just applauded and encouraged us," Collins said.

Tim Williamson, president and co-founder of The Idea Village, said the Imagination Movers' success owes to their "extreme passion about what they are doing." The group came to the business incubator in 2003 seeking guidance in getting their company started. Williamson views their story as an inspiration to other aspiring entrepreneurs and proof of the viability of New Orleans' cultural economy.

"We've always been a great creative place for music and food," Williamson said. "What the Imagination Movers are validating is that we are also a place that can commercialize our creativity."•

— Sonya Stinson



PHOTO BY FRANK AYAMI

The Imagination Movers, from left, Scott Durbin, Scott Smith, Dave Poche and Rich Collins, made their national TV debut Sept. 6 on The Disney Channel.

Landscapedia.info

Key innovation: a networking and information Web site for landscape professionals

Biggest client: customers worldwide

Where they're based: temporarily in Ruston, with plans to move to New Orleans

Top executive: Michael Franklin, designer and developer

Year introduced: 2006

AS A LANDSCAPE DESIGNER, Michael Franklin was frustrated there were no free tools for landscape professionals to source out their plans, create project reports for their clients or get ideas for plant combinations.

So he created www.landscapedia.info, a networking and information Web site for landscape professionals. Similar tools for landscape design professionals would cost a few hundred dollars a year. At first, he created Landscapedia just for himself. But after listening to friends in the business express similar frustrations, he shared it with them and word spread quickly.

"Friends told friends and it took off. ... It's grown like crazy," Franklin said.

In addition to the Web site, Franklin created a Landscapedia application for the iPhone, which Apple has approved. The application allows users to access Landscapedia, access information about a specific plant and find out what other plants complement it. Franklin said this is an important tool because plant tags at garden centers often provide only a brief description of the plant. Without the application, designers would have to carry horticultural magazines with them for reference.

Landscapedia's reach extends outside Louisiana and the United States. Debbie Metrustry, a landscape designer in Dublin, Ireland, is a visitor and fan of the site.

"Landscapedia is an excellent site and collaboration tool," said Metrustry, who is spreading the word in the Irish landscape design community. "There is a vast library of plants available already and I like the companion plant suggestions, too."

The suggestions are also a big plus for Jennifer Estes, managing editor of State-by-State Gardening Magazines.

"Visitors to the site can get something that might not have occurred to them otherwise," Estes said.

Networking is another facet of the site. Franklin said 60 percent of Association of Professional Landscape Designers members do not have Web sites or portfolios. Landscapedia allows landscapers to post pictures and portfolios online, with minimal knowledge of Web design or hosting.

Franklin plans to market Landscapedia to garden centers this fall, offering to host their inventories for free. This would allow designers to check a garden center's inventory online and possibly avoid an unnecessary trip to the store. •

— Fritz Esker

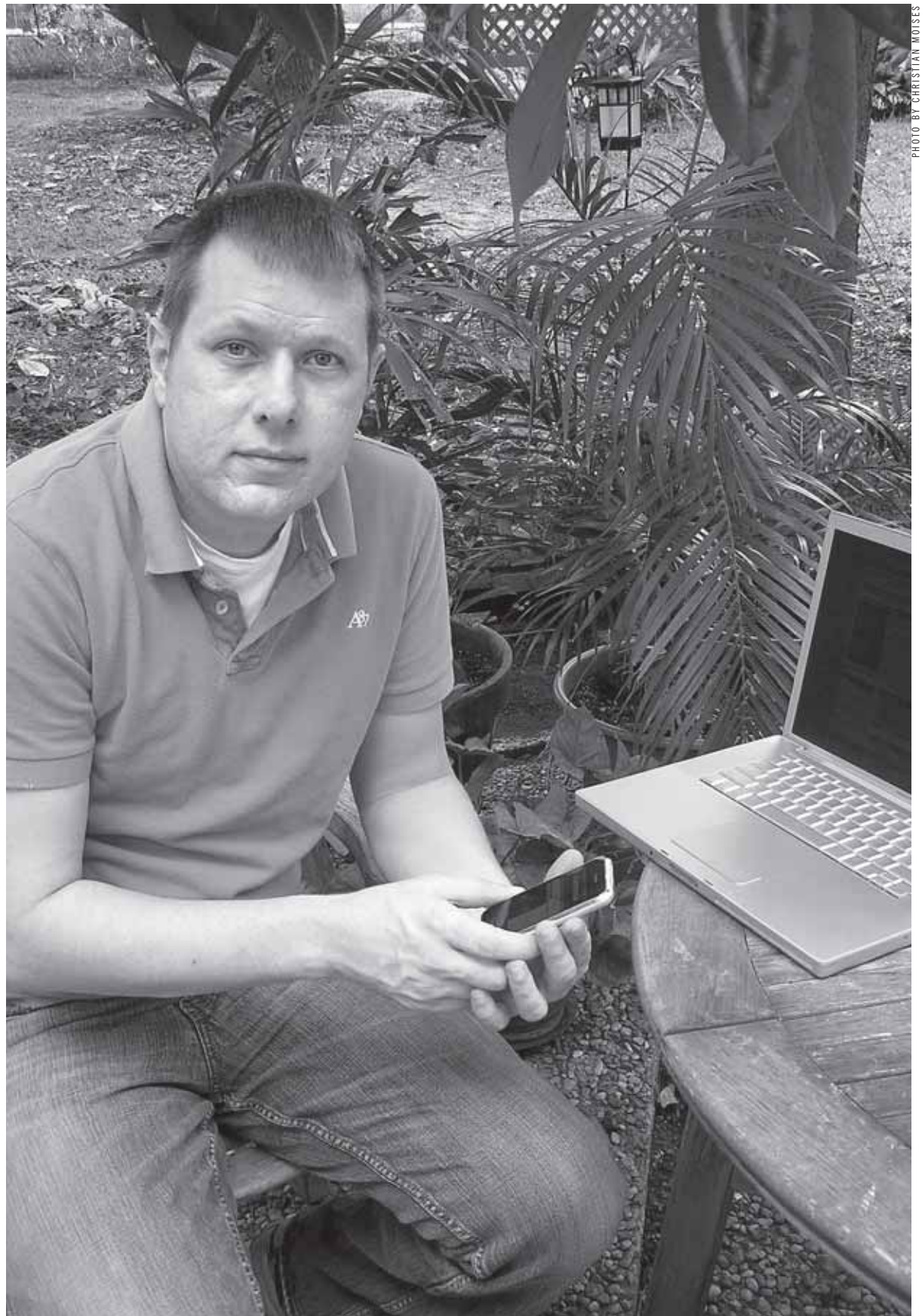


PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN MOISES

Michael Franklin's Landscapedia.info Web site helps landscape professionals as far away as Ireland create project reports and plant combinations.



PHOTO BY FRANK AYMANI

From left: Lifestyle Revolution Group members Matt Alleman, Stephanie Mayne, Robert LeBlanc, Brandon Brown, Star Hodgson, Bruce Fowler, Selena Dovovan and Holly Messa gather at Loa in the International House Hotel.

The Lifestyle Revolution Group

Key innovation: entertainment company whose goal is to enhance New Orleans nightlife through Republic, Le Phare and Loa bars
Biggest client: “Progressive-minded New Orleanians”
Where they’re based: New Orleans
Top executive: Robert LeBlanc, creator
Year introduced: 2005
2007 sales: \$3.3 million

ROBERT LEBLANC’S PLAN is simple: Bring in people from all sectors of life, mesh them together and see what happens.

Simple, yet revolutionary.

LeBlanc is not conducting social psychology experiments, per se, nor is he studying demographics or behavioral science. Rather, LeBlanc’s social planning is about entertainment. And as the creator of the Lifestyle

Revolution Group, a rising entertainment company, LeBlanc has begun to set his ideas in motion.

“If you can put people in the same room and just give them a platform to have a conversation or realize that they have something in common, it’s just sort of powerful what can happen from that,” said LeBlanc, whose company owns three downtown bars — Republic, Le Phare and Loa.

“We still don’t really think of them in the context of bars. We do understand that we need to sell drinks obviously to stay open, but we really try to just be places or outlets where people can socialize with one another,” he said.

In short, LeBlanc would like his venues to be a literal manifestation of the online networking site Facebook.

LeBlanc came up with the idea for Republic just months after Hurricane Katrina, when returning New Orleanians found their social networks scattered across the country and new people were coming in to help with the recovery. Neither group, he thought, had a very strong

sense of community. Republic opened in December 2005 with the hopes of bringing these people together.

The Lifestyle Revolution Group continues to foster these relationships through a range of events, including everything from fundraisers and fashion shows to nightclub parties and indie rock concerts.

LeBlanc also strives for his spaces to feel approachable and he encourages his staff to embody a genuine sense of New Orleans hospitality.

“No matter how nice the space is or how nice the drink is, it doesn’t have to cost an arm and leg and it doesn’t have to come at the hands of a snob or an elite. That’s genuinely a New Orleans tradition,” LeBlanc said.

LeBlanc, who attends most of the Lifestyle Revolution Group events, tries to make himself approachable.

“Anybody who ever met me, there’s no way they could say, ‘he’s cool.’ I’m awkward, clumsy and all that,” he said. “It’s not just a passing observation.”•

— Leah Bartos

M.S. Rau Antiques

Key innovation: using a customer relations marketing software to manage and match inventory and clients
Where they're based: New Orleans
Top executive: Bill Rau, president and CEO
Year introduced: 2004
2007 sales: \$51 million

THE ROMANCE BETWEEN 96-year-old M.S. Rau Antiques and a hot, young software program called Pivotal CRM has given birth to \$50 million-plus revenues post-Hurricane Katrina when other businesses have struggled.

Although he's a third-generation owner of the largest volume antique dealer in the nation, a business steeped in history and tradition, Bill Rau never stops looking forward and investing in technology to streamline business operations.

"I remember when my father would sell something, he would scratch it out of the books," said Rau, who recalls installing the company's first computer system around 1991.

Several years ago, Rau invested in a customer relations marketing software program. Because it lacked capabilities specific to the antiques business, it was disappointingly nothing more than a glorified telephone directory, he said. In 2004, Rau discovered the Pivotal CRM and had it customized by St. Louis-based Maverick Technologies to support M.S. Rau's needs.

"From a retail standpoint, we're very unique because every single item is unique," Rau said. "To cross-sell effectively and make sales data meaningful, we need to carefully group and categorize products by type, style, era and so forth."

M.S. Rau's thousands of antiques are catalogued and available for the company's catalogs and Web site. The system is updated every time an item is sold. Additionally, the dealer's numerous clients are catalogued with personal preferences, buying habits, wish lists and even special occasions such as birthdays and anniversaries.

"Before, we would buy things and hope they matched what people wanted," Rau said. "Now, we very much use technology to try and figure out what we should be buying instead of going by the seat of our pants."

The new system was just getting its legs when Katrina hit. Nancy Kuo, information technology director who had only been on the job two months, retrieved all of the Pivotal CRM data before evacuating and ran systems from a host company in Dallas. Through this arrangement, Rau was able to contact customers. He sent an e-mail, reporting on the status of employees, the business and New Orleans as information unfolded.

"The customer communication we were able to do through Pivotal CRM kept M.S. Rau Antiques alive," Kuo said.

When it became clear New Orleans wouldn't rebound that quickly, the new software allowed M.S. Rau to tap into a much bigger, virtual market than what would have walked through the doors on Royal Street.

"Walk-ins used to account for 60 percent of our business," said Chief Financial Officer Scott Ferguson. "Now roughly 70 percent of our business is done online through Pivotal CRM." •

— Angelle Bergeron



M.S. Rau Antiques salesman Phillip Youngberg, right, shows a Tiffany silver flatware set to customers Dorothy Guthrie, left, and Ann Calhoun.

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMANI

N.O. Firefighters Pension Fund Lakewood Golf Club

Key innovation: the New Orleans Firefighters Pension Fund is spearheading the rehabilitation of the Lakewood Country Club to include firemen-related themes throughout the course

Where they're based: New Orleans

Top executive: Cynthia Rico, golf course general manager

Year introduced: under construction

ONCE HIGHLY POPULAR with New Orleans area golfers in the early 1960s, the Lakewood Country Club had fallen on hard times by 2003 when it was closed to the public and on the brink of declaring bankruptcy.

"This place has had a lot of ups and downs," said Cynthia Rico, general manager for the course. "And that was pretty much a down time."

Then along came the New Orleans Firefighters Pension Fund, which in the spring of 2003 bought the property for \$6 million and has since been involved in its rebuilding.

"We thought it was both the right thing to do as well as being a good overall investment," said Richard Hampton, CEO and secretary-treasurer of the pension fund board.

"Traditionally our pension fund has been involved with a variety of projects in the New Orleans area and throughout Louisiana," said Hampton of a fund with nearly 700 active members. "But it gave us special pleasure to be a part of bringing a great facility back to working order."

Renamed Lakewood Golf Club, the facility faced additional challenges because of damages from Hurricane Katrina.

"For a while there was even talk that FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Administration) wanted to use the land to put trailers on it, even though nothing ever came of that," Rico said.

Instead, the renovation work on a course that once hosted the likes of Lee Trevino and Jack Nicklaus, among other golf champions, has continued at an accelerated pace.

Under the direction of golf course architect Ron Garl, the \$9 million renovation includes modernized fairways, tees and greens and features an 18th-hole trap in the shape of flames using red sand imported from Florida.

"There are firefighter themes throughout the course, which we thought were appropriate considering that it is the firefighters pension fund that is developing this whole thing," Hampton said.

Said Rico: "It's just been amazing how the firefighters pension fund got involved with this and has done such good work. It makes me feel that the course, which everyone said was finished, is now going to have a very long future."•

— Garry Boulard



PHOTO BY TRACIE MORRIS SCHAEFER

Cynthia Rico, vice president of operations for the Lakewood Gold Club development, reviews plans for the redeveloped course with New Orleans Firefighter Pension Fund president William Carrouche, left, and pension fund CEO Richard Hampton.



PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAKI

Kenneth Purcell, founder and CEO of iSeatz, has added On My Way to his Web-based travel assistance system, which helps travelers make plans when affected by flight delays or other travel disruptions.

On My Way — iSeatz

Key innovation: On My Way, a travel assistance service offered on Air Canada's Web site for customers affected by flight delays or travel disruptions.

Biggest client: Northwest Airlines

Where they're based: New Orleans and New York

Top executive: Kenneth Purcell, founder and CEO

Year introduced: 1999

2007 sales: \$8 million

VALENTINE'S DAY 2007 was not very romantic for JetBlue customers in New York. An ice storm gripped the Northeast that day and most airlines cancelled flights and sent passengers home. But JetBlue thought the weather would break. People who were already on planes sat for hours.

One of those passengers was Kenneth Purcell. "I had a new puppy on my lap," he said. "Then the power on the

plane went out, and all the TVs went off." From this experience was born a concept called On My Way, a travel assistance service for customers.

"If you have a ticket and your flight gets delayed, some people feel entitled to some kind of accommodation, and they are really not," Purcell said. "Air Canada wanted to enhance their service. They had a concept but no way to execute it. With On My Way, customers can add insurance to their plane ticket, which enables you to get a hotel or rental car, meal vouchers and ground transportation to the hotel."

Purcell created a Web site called iSeatz in 1999, which allowed visitors to make restaurant reservations online. He soon realized that he needed to go further with his idea.

"We realized that just doing restaurant reservations is a hard way to make a living. We had to get profitable. The cost of building our own brand would cost millions of dollars. But we could power other people's Web sites, and we

began to expand to the hotel and rental car business."

And expand they have. In 2007, iSeatz had more than \$8 million in revenue. This year, it is expected to go up to \$40 million. iSeatz now has clients such as Northwest and Delta Airlines and is about to go international this year, which will involve the complexity of multiple languages and different types of currency.

Purcell's team consists of executives who previously worked for companies such as Hotels.com, Expedia and Delta Airlines.

"We are improving upon the deficiencies of other companies. We're more efficient and make decisions quickly and effectively."

After Hurricane Katrina, Purcell moved his operation to New York.

"My goal by the end of the second quarter next year is to have all of my people back in New Orleans," he said. "I am thrilled to be home." •

— Lisa Bacques

On the Move Elmwood Fitness Center

Key innovation: mobile fitness unit that travels to regional public schools
Biggest clients: Orleans and Jefferson public school students
Where they're based: Harahan
Top executive: Michael Heim, director
Year introduced: 2008

NEW ORLEANS-AREA CHILDREN are facing an epidemic of obesity and a host of related grownup diseases, while many public schools are cutting physical education classes.

Arriving in New Orleans from Cleveland six years ago, Dr. Douglas Moodie, chairman of pediatrics at Ochsner Medical Center and a pediatric cardiologist, was shocked to discover the extent of the problem.

"I never saw more overweight teenagers than I was seeing here," Moodie said. "Young kids 14 years old were 400 pounds."

To make the case for the importance of physical activity and good nutrition in children's health, Ochsner's Elmwood Fitness Center rolled its new mobile fitness unit onto two elementary school campuses last spring to launch its On the Move program. Created and directed by Michael Heim, youth manager at the fitness center, the program is free to participating schools.

This fall, the mobile unit will travel to T.H. Harris Middle School and Audubon Elementary School in Jefferson Parish and KIPP Believe College Prep and Audubon Charter School in Orleans Parish.

The mobile fitness unit will visit each school twice during the fall semester. Elmwood Fitness Center employees are on hand to provide circuit training, nutritionists will give talks on healthy eating and a chef occasionally will give a cooking demonstration. The unit is outfitted with child-size weight-training equipment designed to make exercising fun.

"What's unique about this equipment is that as you are lifting the weight stacks, the seats move, so it's like the child is on a ride," Heim said.

With their focus on tackling obesity, On the Move staff members were all set to help kids take off the pounds. What they didn't expect was to find so many cases of the opposite problem: underweight kids.

"That's the other end of the spectrum," Moodie said. "We've got a group of kids — and it can be related to education and poverty — that just aren't getting the nutrition or the foods they need on a daily basis."

As for children who are carrying around far too much weight, the need for intervention is urgent, from Moodie's perspective as a pediatric cardiologist.

"Heart attacks and strokes don't start in your 40s and 50s; the risk factors start in childhood," Moodie said. "If we can identify kids who are overweight or have high blood pressure or high cholesterol and get them to change their lifestyles ... we can actually prevent coronary artery disease from happening."•

— Sonya Stinson



Michael Heim, youth fitness manager of Elmwood Fitness Center's On the Move mobile fitness unit, works with Caitlyn Lewis, 13.

PHOTO BY FRANK AYAMI

PhytoCeutical Formulations

Key innovation: Swerve, an all-natural sugar alternative
Biggest client: Whole Foods
Where they're based: Mandeville
Top executive: Catherine Wilbert, founder and formulator
Year introduced: 2001
2007 sales: \$1 million

THE INFAMOUS CRY “let them eat cake” might not be perceived so negatively these days, what with the invention of the natural sugar alternative Swerve.

“With Swerve, you can have your cake and eat it, too,” said Swerve formulator Catherine Wilbert. “In the big scheme of things, no one wants to give up indulgences. With Swerve, you don’t have to.”

The Mandeville practitioner of naturopathic medicine saw a need to develop a natural sweetener eight years ago when she began formulating nutritional supplements.

“The biggest challenge became ‘how do you sweeten things and keep them all natural?’ I had no option,” Wilbert said.

Her solution was Swerve, made from the fibrous parts of certain fruits and then crystallized, yielding a product marketed as tasting and acting like sugar, without causing the adverse health affects often associated with sugar and other sweeteners.

“The biggest difference is it has zero calories and zero glycemic index,” Wilbert said. “Swerve is the first and the only all-natural sugar substitute that looks, measures, tastes, cooks, bakes, freezes and candies just like sugar.”

In taste tests, Wilbert said, many people could not tell the difference between Swerve and sugar.

Wilbert points out the health benefits Swerve offers for a country suffering such ailments as diabetes and obesity, both driven by elevated insulin levels.

“Insulin drives all your other hormones,” Wilbert said. “(Consider) the impact it could have on this country. Our No. 1 issue is carbohydrates and sugar. Everyone understands the problem with sugar.”

An estimated 20 million Americans have Type 2 diabetes, which increases the risk of kidney disease, blindness, eye disease and amputations, according to established health reports.

Americans consume 20 teaspoons of added sugar daily — twice the amount the U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends. In the past 20 years, annual sugar consumption in the United States has ballooned from 26 pounds to 135 pounds per person, according to USDA statistics.

Swerve comes in 1- and 3-pound packages, in bulk and in 50-packet boxes in stores in all 50 states, most notably the Whole Foods chain, and in franchised Vitality Juice, Java and Smoothie bars in Harahan and Mandeville. Products are also available at www.pcflabs.com and www.vitalityjuice.com.

Additionally, the entire PhytoCeutical line of natural products is sweetened with Swerve.

Wilbert points out using Swerve reduces calories in any dish traditionally prepared with sugar, including smoothies, candies, sauces, ice cream and baked dishes.

“You can make a praline with Swerve,” she said. •

— Diana Chandler



PHOTO BY SHANNON DIECIDUE

PhytoCeutical Formulations founder and formulator Catherine Wilbert sprinkles her all-natural sugar substitute Swerve on strawberries.

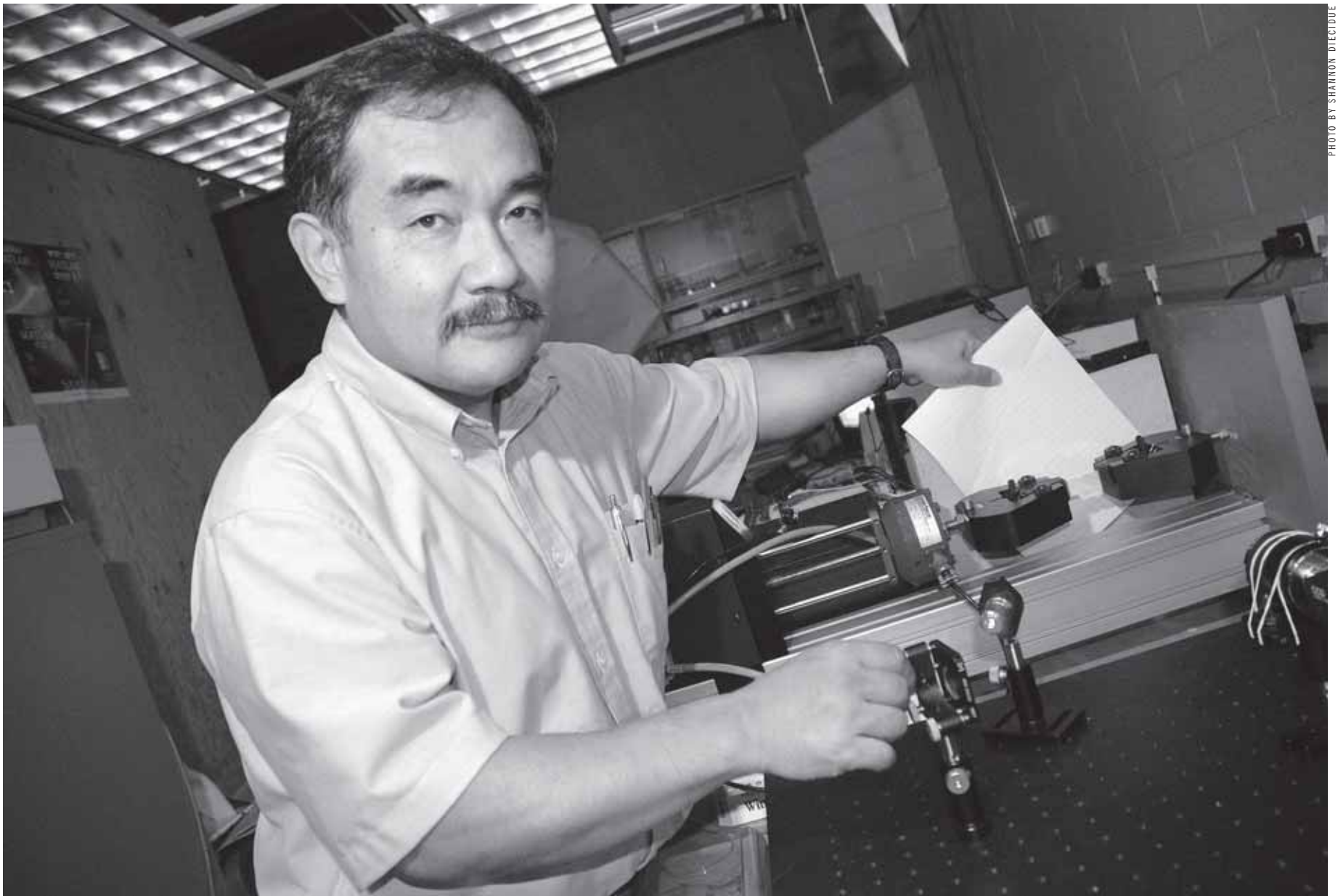


PHOTO BY SHANNON DIECIDUE

Sanichiro Yoshida, with the Southeastern Louisiana University department of chemistry and physics, is working on a technology to identify the weakest spot in materials ranging from plastics to metals.

Optical interferometry

Sanichiro Yoshida

Key innovation: a method to identify the weakest spot in materials ranging from plastic to metal

Where they're based: Southeastern Louisiana University

Top executive: Gerard Blanchard, SLU's chemistry and physics department chairman

Year introduced: 2008

IF THE MOST important point in any chain is its weakest link, then Sanichiro Yoshida has developed a process that could revolutionize the way almost everything is constructed, from big bridges to the smallest bits of nanotechnology.

Securing a patent this spring for a deformation prediction instrument, Yoshida, a professor of physics who specializes in optical interferometry and field theory at Southeastern Louisiana University's department of chemistry and

physics, has come up with a method of identifying the weakest spot in materials ranging from plastic to metal.

"It is something that we have been researching for quite a long while," said Yoshida, who first began to do work with lasers and lights in the early 1980s before also exploring the possibilities of optical interferometry a decade later.

Working with Russian scientists in Siberia before the Soviet Union collapsed, Yoshida built upon their research, which measured changes in the crust of the earth as a means of predicting earthquakes through the use of satellite technology.

"We went from that use of this application and put it to other uses," said Yoshida, who joined the SLU faculty in 1991.

Applying the principles he learned in Siberia to optical interferometry, Yoshida has been able to measure the differences in path lengths when a laser is aimed at an object. By so doing, the laser picks up on displacements in the object,

providing a valuable and economic tool for engineers and builders.

Yoshida credits SLU's undergraduate students for helping him to repeatedly test his theory. He also thanks the school, which he said has always supported him in his research.

That support is hardly an accident, said Gerard Blanchard.

"We look at research itself as a teaching activity here," said Blanchard, head of SLU's chemistry and physics department, which has a faculty of just more than 24.

That support, Yoshida said, has been critical in the development of the deformation prediction instrument — a development that has proceeded over the course of two decades.

"These things do take a long time," Yoshida said, "but it's not frustrating. I enjoy the process. It's my life."•

— Garry Boulard

Schonberg and Associates

Key innovation: senior care facilities with holistic, age-in-place design
Where they're based: New Orleans
Top executive: David Schonberg, owner and managing partner
Year introduced: 2001
2007 sales: \$11.5 million

WHEN DAVID SCHONBERG got into the business of building and operating assisted-living facilities, he was determined to provide more than just housing and a competent medical staff. The patients' emotional well-being would be just as important.

"I took it from an institutional and medical approach to taking care of our seniors to a behavioral approach," said Schonberg, who spent many years as a nursing home administrator in Texas before starting his own company in New Orleans. "You put somebody in a better, cleaner, qui-

eter environment and you're going to get better results."

The color, lighting and even the sound in Schonberg's facilities are designed to create an atmosphere that enhances the residents' sense of calm and security.

"It cuts down on confusion and agitation," Schonberg said.

A major turning point for Schonberg came when he returned to New Orleans from Texas after several years of working for Advanced Care Centers of America and delved into a new career area.

"I moved home and started doing some real estate projects — redevelopment of neighborhoods, condominium developments and things of that sort," he said. "I thought it was a natural to take my real estate background, coupled with my health care background, and build my first assisted living facility/memory care facility."

Schonberg's first facility, the Suites at Sugar Mill Point in Houma, was constructed in 2002. He later built another senior community in Hattiesburg, Miss., and acquired three existing facilities in South Carolina.

All of Schonberg and Associates' senior-care facilities employ an age-in-place model, providing a continuum of care that makes life easier for patients and their families, said Kathy McPhail, manager of Alden Pointe Assisted Living in Hattiesburg.

"It's difficult enough to move Mom or Dad into a facility. It's even more difficult when we have to say (the needs of) Mom and Dad exceed the scope of what we're about," McPhail said. "With the age-in-place philosophy, if they bring Mom in and she's on level one, we have different levels of care, so she can age in place ... all the way 'til the end."

After working out of his home for years, Schonberg recently set up a corporate headquarters on South Claiborne Avenue. Looking ahead, the company is considering expanding its Louisiana operations into Thibodaux and St. Charles Parish.

"Now that I've kind of got my critical mass, I'm coming home to start growing," Schonberg said. •

— Sonya Stinson



From left: David Schonberg, Stuart Coleman and Cheryl Golich review plans for an assisted living center.



PHOTO BY FRANK AYAMAMI

Sucr  pastry chef Tariq Hanna, left, and CEO Joel Dondis opened the high-end sweets boutique on Magazine Street in April 2007.

Sucr 

Key innovation: a high-end, designer sweets boutique
Where they're based: New Orleans
Top executive: Joel Dondis, CEO
Year introduced: 2007
2007 sales: about \$1 million, excluding Internet sales

CAPTURING THE RICH, multi-layered spirit of New Orleans in confection requires the ornate interpretation of sugar that is Sucr , a designer sweets boutique at 3025 Magazine St.

Presenting such a platter in post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans is the innovation of restaurateur Joel Dondis and executive pastry chef Tariq Hanna, on the scene since April 2007.

The edible artistry requires the creativity, climate control, engineering and marketing Dondis and Hanna have achieved.

Sucr , which Dondis calls a "department store of con-

fection," offers handmade chocolates, pastry, ice cream dishes and drinks, with sandwiches, salads, wine and non-alcoholic beverages.

"Nobody had ever done this," Hanna said. "People have made chocolate, people have made breads, people have made ice cream. No one has taken every facet of the pastry industry and rolled it into one. A city and a state that has the greatest food heritage in the entire country deserved to have something like this."

The creation of designer chocolates in New Orleans' humid climate is the shop's most unique undertaking, Dondis said, as the humidity must be kept at 45 percent to properly manufacture the confection. To achieve this, Sucr  purchased a tempering and enrobing machine from Germany and installed special cooling, ventilation and heating systems.

For more than a year, Sucr  made its entire line of treats in a 650-square-foot kitchen on site. The company's growing success includes adding a 5,000-square-foot production facility in a Louisiana Enterprise Zone scheduled to open in October and a second store in an undisclosed location.

Hanna's artisanal chocolates incorporate New Orleans' unique gumbo of flavors by using local products and creating new renditions of local favorites.

His Blange is a white-chocolate-ganache take on bananas Foster creator Paul Blange's famed dessert, with fresh banana and a smidgen of rum. The caramel and milk ganache Hanna calls Avery is topped with a bit of salt from the mines at Avery Island. Chicory is in the milk chocolate Magnolia. And the fleur-de-lis-shaped Meuniere, also marketed as the Saints collection, blends brown butter and toasted almond.

On display in Sucr 's window is a replica of a pot of seafood gumbo — a completely edible sweet layer cake — Hanna created at the request of a local groom for his big day.

Dondis said Sucr  completes New Orleans' rightful image among romantic getaways.

"I think New Orleans has name (ambience) like New York or Paris. Many people love New Orleans in that way, and I think it's a void in our market," he said. •

— Diana Chandler

Tulane University Center for Public Service

Key innovation: a chance for students to earn course credit through volunteer work in the city
Biggest beneficiaries: Hispanic Apostolate, Sophie B. Wright School
Where they're based: New Orleans
Top executive: Vincent Ilustre, executive director
Year introduced: 2006

AFTER HURRICANE KATRINA, the city's need for volunteer help was massive. To meet that demand, Tulane University instituted a public service requirement for its students and founded the Center for Public Service to provide support services for faculty, students and community partners.

Executive Director Vincent Ilustre said about 100 courses each semester feature a service learning compo-

nent. Between 1,500 and 2,000 students each semester participate in the program, each donating 20 to 40 hours of service.

"It allows students to learn by doing," Ilustre said. "They can see theories in action."

The community partners who work with Tulane on the project receive the assistance they need. For example, students taking an educational psychology course will get hands-on experience tutoring students at area schools. Students in biomedical engineering courses design adaptive medical devices for injured people.

"The activity has to match closely with the objectives of the course," Ilustre said.

The opportunities are not limited to Tulane students. Tulane offers a Semester in NOLA program to students from other universities, who can stay in New Orleans for five weeks during the summer to participate in internships and attend panel presentations.

"We wanted to frame their activities so they have a little more background on the things they're doing and why a topic is framed a certain way in New Orleans," Ilustre said.

The summer program was founded in part to further help the city recover and pay a debt Tulane felt it owed other universities around the country.

"We had all these universities take in our students (after Katrina). We wanted to return the hospitality," Ilustre said.

Like any hands-on project, the knowledge students gain is not limited to the realm of academia.

"Having heard many stories from New Orleans' working class has helped me understand the universal nature of human experience: no matter what race, education or social status a person has, all people fundamentally have the same concerns and desires," said service learning program student Ross Kelley. •

— Fritz Esker



Vincent Ilustre, executive director of the Tulane University Center for Public Service, maps where Tulane students have fulfilled their public service requirement to graduate.

PHOTO BY FRANK AYWAMI



PHOTO BY TRACIE MORRIS SCHAFFER

Zapp's Potato Chips president Ron Zappe created Purify as a way to save money and recycle frying oil to create his snacks.

Zapp's Potato Chips

Key innovation: a chemical powder that can purify and extend the life of cooking oil
Biggest clients: Kroger grocery stores, Premium Snacks food manufacturers
Where they're based: Gramercy
Top executive: Ron Zappe, president
Year introduced: 1995
2007 sales: "A whole bunch of potato chips."

FOUNDED AS A SMALL operation in 1985, Zapp's Potato Chips has grown to become a major snack food manufacturer. With 11 different flavors and fans all over the world, the Gramercy-based company produces more than 100,000 bags of chips per day.

Zapp's president Ron Zappe confirmed that necessity is the mother of all invention when he searched for a way to minimize his cooking oil costs back in 1994. Having to

reload the fryers with more than 30,000 pounds of new oil every 15 days, oil was growing to be a major expense.

With the help of chemical engineers and through experimentation, Zappe sought out a way to purify his own oil without having to replace it.

Despite the fact they would ultimately use less oil, their supplier LouAna Foods offered up the assistance of its lab personnel. The end result was a proprietary powder covered by four patents that absorbs all the impurities in the oil through polar attraction. The powder is put into the peanut oil and after circulating for a half-hour, it absorbs all the crumbs which are then removed with a filtration system.

"We haven't thrown away any oil since 1994, and it's essentially new every morning," Zappe said.

Realizing his new discovery could benefit other food manufacturers, Zappe named the product Purify and created Louisiana Chemical Co. in 1995. The product is being used by a number of food manufacturers such as Premium

Snacks in Oxnard, Calif., a company that was replacing about \$10,000 worth of oil every three weeks before using Purify, said General Manager Kevin Holden.

"We started using it in 2003 and haven't thrown away any oil in a couple of years. I don't know if we'd even be here if it wasn't for Purify. We're a small company and \$10,000 every three weeks is huge," Holden said.

Zappe said that until recently, he hasn't put much effort into marketing Purify. Focusing more on his potato chip business, he said that only recently with the increasing price of oil has he begun to put more energy into the product. Zappe is now working on a cost-effective restaurant version of the product and hopes to have it on the market soon.

"There are some people using the product, but we really don't try too hard to sell it. We're in the potato chip business. Oil costs have doubled in the past year so I'm becoming more popular."•

— Craig Guillot

Aquadex FlexFlow

Ochsner Health System

Key innovation: an ultrafiltration process to remove water and salt from the body at a rate controlled by the attending physician

Biggest clients: cardiovascular patients

Where they're based: New Orleans

Top executive: Mark French, vice president of the Ochsner Heart and Vascular Institute

Year introduced: 2007

PATIENTS WITH CONGESTIVE heart failure often suffer life-threatening excess fluid retention that doctors formerly removed with intravenous diuretics. That was until the invention of the Aquadex FlexFlow Fluid Removal System in 2002.

The Ochsner Heart and Vascular Institute was the first to use the system locally and has treated some 20 patients since employing the device last year. The institute credits cardiologist Dr. Hector Ventura with leading the push to offer the procedure here.

"I knew many of the people who were involved in the (development of the) device," said Ventura, director of the institute's Cardiology Residency Program. "This machine will help take the fluid away without creating more problems for the patient."

Aquadex uses ultrafiltration, a process used in dialysis, to remove water and salt from the body at a rate controlled by the attending physician. The device can remove up to a pound of water and salt per hour without adversely affecting kidney function, heart rate, blood pressure or the electrolyte balance, according to Congestive Heart Failure Solutions, the Minneapolis medical device company that holds the patent for the Aquadex system.

The system is small and portable, engaged by inserting catheters into patients' veins. Aquadex patients achieve a 28 percent greater net fluid loss over standard care, according to the 2006 results of a medical trial of 200 patients, and a 63 percent reduction in days rehospitalized for heart failure over standard care. These results reduce medical costs to hospitals and improve the quality of life for patients and their families, CHFS emphasizes.

Susan Reyes, a local CHFS representative, said hospitals can buy the system for \$25,000 per unit and offer treatment for less than \$1,000 per session, accounting for disposal filters that are \$900 each.

While Ochsner was first to use the system in the New Orleans area, Reyes said the procedure is now available at Tulane Medical Center and the Louisiana State University Interim Hospital.

Ventura shared one of his most memorable cases to date, a lady who was treated with the system for seven days.

"She lost about 30 pounds of fluid. She was very grateful."•

— Diana Chandler



PHOTO BY FRANK AYAMAMI

Dr. Hector Ventura, cardiologist and director of Ochsner's Heart and Vascular Institute, led the push to offer the Aquadex System FlexFlow to remove water and salt from patients.

Cryoplasty Touro Infirmary

Key innovation: a minimally invasive way of treating peripheral artery disease

Where they're based: New Orleans

Top executive: Dr. Roberto Quintal, medical division director for cardiology

Year introduced: 2008

ABOUT 10 MILLION Americans suffer from Peripheral Artery Disease, a blockage of arteries to the legs, which can result in pain, stiffness and an inability to walk. It's also the leading cause of leg amputation in the United States.

At Touro Infirmary, vascular surgeon Dr. Hernan Bazan has introduced cryoplasty to treat the disease.

Cryoplasty is particularly important in New Orleans because PAD often comes as a result of poor diet or smoking. Because of the region's high rates of obesity and smoking, PAD is more common here and the cases are often more severe.

"It's a way of opening either total occlusions or narrowing of the blood vessels," Bazan said.

Angioplasty, another common way of treating PAD, opens vessels in an uncontrolled manner. Cryoplasty opens the blood vessels in a controlled manner with a specially designed catheter balloon, treating the problem locally at each vessel with thermal energy by cooling, then warming.

This causes the cells lining the vessel to die. These cells are what cause narrowing over time after a traditional balloon angioplasty. Because of cryoplasty's controlled nature, not as many stents, or tubes, are required, meaning the procedure is cheaper and a reduced chance of re-narrowing of blood vessels, something that often happens when stents fracture or crack.

The process is also easier on the patient because it only requires local anesthesia, whereas angioplasties require general anesthesia. Patients are able to go home the same day and have a reduced risk of infection.

Cryoplasty can also treat certain parts of the leg where stents often fail, such as the knee and vessel blockages just below the knee.

Cryoplasty has been a godsend for Lydice Ellis.

Ellis was having trouble walking, feeling an intense burning sensation in her calf if she walked just half a block. She tried medications and blood thinners, but after those didn't work, she underwent a cryoplasty and couldn't be happier with the results.

"It's life changing because I can get around a lot better now," Ellis said. •

— Fritz Esker

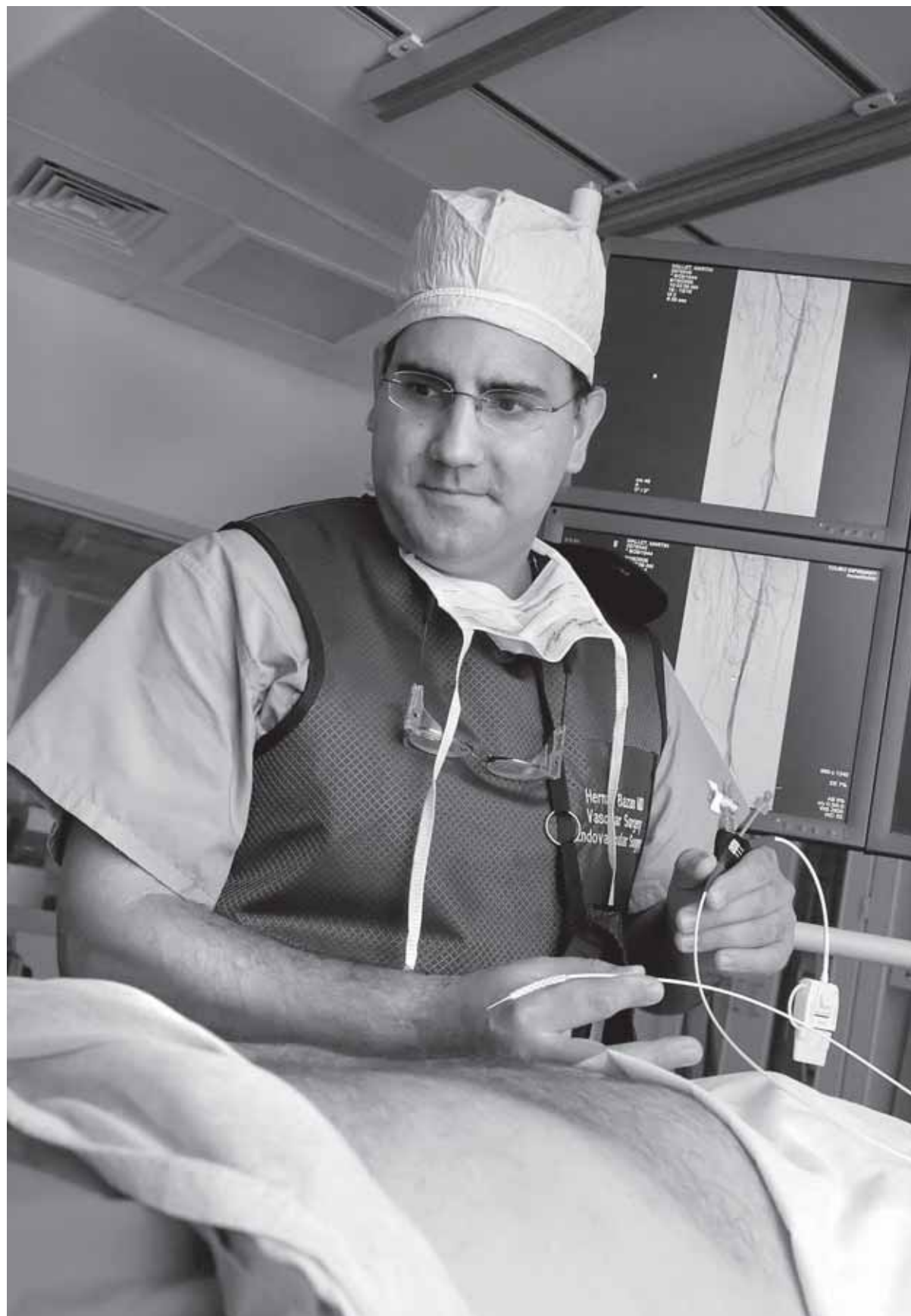


PHOTO BY FRANK AYMANI

Touro Infirmary vascular surgeon Dr. Hernan Bazan started offering cryoplasty as an easier and less invasive option to normal angioplasties.

Deep Brain Stimulation

Ochsner Health System

Key innovation: a technology that sends electric pulses to pinpointed areas of the brain that cause uncontrolled movements

Clients: New Orleans area patients with movement disorders

Where they're based: New Orleans

Top executives: Dr. Jayaraman Rao, neurosurgeon, and Dr. Roger Smith, chairman of Ochsner Health System's neurosurgery department

Year introduced: February 2008

DOCTORS IN THE neurosurgery department at Ochsner Health System have grasped a technological advancement that is changing the way brain surgeons treat patients with movement disorders such as Parkinson's disease or familial tremors.

Dr. Roger Smith, chairman of the neurosurgery department at Ochsner, said he and fellow neurosurgeon Dr.

Jayaraman Rao have been using Deep Brain Stimulation to send electric pulses to pinpointed areas of the brain that cause uncontrolled movements. The doctors say it is a revolutionary treatment that has changed the way neurosurgeons operate on patients with movement disorders.

"In the past, surgeons who were treating diseases like Parkinson's would have to go into the brain and damage small areas causing the movements," Smith said. "It was once thought that freezing these parts of the brain could help patients control certain tremors, but it was not always the case."

Smith said the process comes from the same technology used for certain spinal cord injuries. He said doctors believed the technology had the potential to transfer over successfully.

"At this stage of research, it is my belief that when the electrodes are placed on the brain, the stimulation does something to block the movements from happening," Smith said. "In treatments we have done at Ochsner, patients with severe Parkinson's tremors end up seeing a dramatic

decrease in movement to where it stops almost instantly."

The new procedure enables doctors to be more precise when searching out target areas of the brain. Smith said the stimulation uses a smaller sensor to determine exactly where the electrode needs to go. He also said the procedure can be altered or reversed if changes needed to be made.

"The reversibility is a stark difference from the way surgeons used to treat these diseases," Smith said. "When doctors go in to do the damage procedure, there is no way to reverse it."

Smith said doctors at Ochsner have been using the stimulation method since February and have seen about 15 patients. The procedure is not exclusive to Ochsner, however, because Rao said he had been using the technology for several years at Louisiana State University.

"The technology has been around since the early '90s," Rao said. "It is technology that is in the early stages. So early, in fact, that we still are not quite sure how it works. We just know it works and works well."•

— Robin Shannon



Drs. Roger Smith, left, and Jayaraman Rao review a brain scan to pinpoint where they need to apply deep brain stimulation.

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAKI

Neevo — PamLab

Key innovation: a prenatal vitamin and folic acid alternative intended for women with high-risk pregnancies and older obstetrics patients

Biggest clients: obstetricians/gynecologists specializing in at-risk births

Where they're based: Covington

Top executive: Jim Currie, project manager

Year introduced: 2007

PAMLAB DARED TO stand up and kill the sacred cow in their market: folic acid.

Folic acid — the synthetic form of folate, a substance found naturally in foods — is renowned for its ability to prevent birth defects. After it gained fame through the government's recommendations and the March of Dimes, folic acid was undisputed in its prenatal properties.

But the brains at PamLab saw the supplement had its limitations — many women are not able to benefit from folic acid. Mothers older than 30, women with a history of problematic pregnancies and women with a genetic condition that impedes the processing of folic acid into its useable form, l-methylfolate, found the popular prenatal supplement was not enough.

After developers in Germany began to manufacture l-methylfolate commercially, PamLab used this natural form of folic acid in treatments for dementia, Alzheimer's and depression.

The final frontier? Prenatal vitamins. Thus Neevo was born.

Jim Currie, project manager of Neevo, said this innovation was met with much speculation among doctors and nurses.

"How can folic acid be bad?" he said, recounting a typical reaction. "For 30 or 40 years, it's been a hero."

But he said one group has been particularly receptive to Neevo — high-risk pregnancy specialists. In the past, these doctors would hit a wall when dealing with patients who could not use folic acid.

"Neevo is the first prenatal care product specifically indicated for high-risk pregnancies and older OB patients. Almost half of all births in the U.S. are now to mothers over the age of 30," he said. "Now our challenge is to take this enthusiasm (of the high-risk specialists) to the rest of the OB community."

Despite initial reservations from the medical community, Neevo exceeded sales goals in its first year, and more than 100,000 prescriptions for the prenatal vitamin have been written nationwide.

Currie hopes Neevo eventually will influence the market by promoting an alternative to folic acid. But the pharmaceutical company is going to stick to selling its product to doctors and nurses for now before it steps into the limelight.

"We're going to stay off the Oprah show for now," he said. •

— Lauren LaBorde



PHOTO BY SHANNON DIECIQUE

PamLab created Neevo as a prenatal vitamin and folic acid alternative intended for women with high-risk pregnancies.

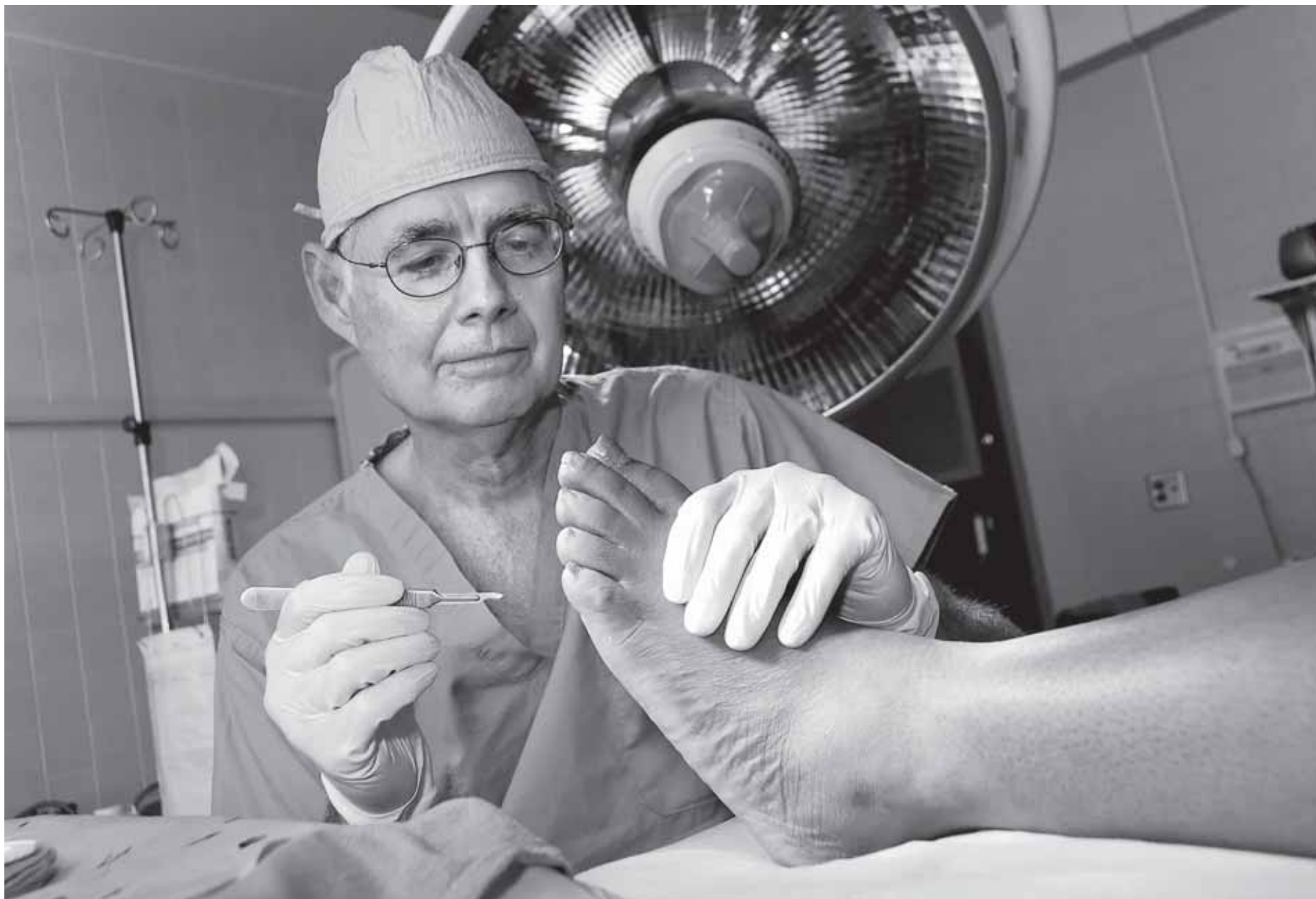


PHOTO BY FRANK AYAMAMI

Dr. James Laborde, an orthopaedic surgeon with Orthopaedic Associates of New Orleans, has pioneered a procedure to lengthen tendons in the foot to heal ulcers.

Orthopaedic Associates of New Orleans

Key innovation: lengthening tendons to heal foot ulcers
Biggest clients: diabetic patients.
Where they're based: New Orleans
Top executive: Dr. James Laborde, Dr. Lance Estrada and Dr. Kevin Watson, partners
Year introduced: 1995

IMAGINE BEING A diabetic patient with chronic foot ulcers who is told that your foot or leg must be amputated. Then imagine your relief when another doctor tells you an outpatient procedure may help prevent an amputation.

In the United States, more than 80,000 amputations are performed each year on diabetic patients and 85 percent of them are because of foot ulcers, according to an American Foot and Ankle Society study. If foot ulcers

could be eliminated, most of these amputations could be prevented.

Dr. James Laborde, an orthopaedic surgeon with Orthopaedic Associates of New Orleans, has pioneered a procedure where patients with chronic foot ulcers can have surgery to lengthen their tendons, which in turn can heal the ulcers.

"In 1995 I was doing tendon lengthening in children with cerebral palsy," Laborde said. "One child got an ulcer, and after the surgery the ulcer went away. I had another patient with diabetes who got an ulcer and was sent to wound care. One year later the patient was told they needed an amputation. I did tendon lengthening and the patient did not need the amputation."

Laborde said the popular opinion is that poor circulation causes foot ulcers.

"Ulcers are really caused by nerve damage, a tightness of

the tendons, and lack of feeling, not circulation problems," Laborde said.

According to the Orthopaedic Association of New Orleans' Web site, www.footulcer.info, ulcers are caused by pressure on the forefoot.

For toe ulcers, Laborde performs a 15-minute office procedure to surgically lengthen the flexor tendons on the toe. For ulcers on the ball of the foot, there is a 45-minute outpatient procedure that lengthens the heel cord. There is also a one-hour procedure to lengthen the calf muscle, in which the patient is able to walk immediately after the surgery.

"It's been very gratifying to see that the patients realize it works," Laborde said.

He stressed that most ulcers can be prevented if diabetics are told by their physician to stretch their calf tendons for several minutes every day. •

— Lisa Bacques

Patient Comment System

Touro Infirmary

Key innovation: customized system for tracking and responding to patient evaluations
Where they're based: New Orleans
Top executive: Dora Prosper, patient relations manager
Year introduced: 2007

FOR YEARS TOURO INFIRMARY would collect evaluation forms from discharged patients and store them on a file server.

Department heads could take a look at the comments if they wished, but there was no method for measuring improvements in patient care in response to the comments or holding individual units accountable for making such improvements.

Last year Touro implemented a new tracking and response system designed to ensure every patient concern from nursing care to the taste of the food gets attention.

Now, all patient comments are distributed electronical-

ly to the appropriate departments, where directors and managers are responsible for responding to each one.

The hospital's information technology, patient relations and organizational learning and effectiveness departments partnered with the health care survey provider Avatar International Inc.

"Avatar tracks the quantitative data. We're tracking the qualitative data," said Touro systems analyst Jason Duncan, who developed the software.

In May, Touro received an Avatar Innovation Award at the annual Avatar Client Symposium in Orlando for its work in improving patient care through the comment system.

Patient relations manager Dora Prosper is responsible for administering the comment system, which randomly selects patients to receive surveys two weeks after they are discharged from the hospital. About 470 patients return the surveys each month.

"I read them and make sure they go to the right department," Prosper said. "Sometimes we have one comment that involves several units, and each unit will get a copy. That

enables the units to correct whatever issue the patient had."

When Duncan and other team members who worked on the project presented a workshop at the Avatar Symposium, they made quite an impression.

"The other hospitals that use Avatar's product didn't have a way to track comments," Duncan said. "When we got done with the demo, we asked if anybody had any questions, and everybody's hand went up."

Workshop participants wanted to know if they could either buy the software or download it for free, but Duncan said making the technology available to others isn't feasible at this point.

"Whenever you develop software, you've got to support it," Duncan said. "We don't have the staff to give that good customer support."

At Touro, the system has already shown some positive results. From October to December, the hospital's patient satisfaction scores averaged 91 percent, up from 88.8 percent for the same period the year before. •

— Sonya Stinson



Touro Infirmary systems analyst Jason Duncan and patient relations manager Dora Prosper introduce Touro's Patient Comment System to hospital employees.

PHOTO BY TRACIE MORRIS SCHAEFER



PHOTO BY FRANK AYWAMI

Members of East Jefferson General Hospital's TDI team include, from left, Raquel Joubert, Lindy Sells, Royceann Fugler, Stacy Collins and Melissa Mayer.

TDI Team

East Jefferson General Hospital

Key innovation: establishing the Teaming for Documentation Integrity Program to ensure thorough and accurate documentation
Where they're based: Metairie
Top executive: Stacy Collins, director of health information management
Year introduced: November 2007

AN IMPORTANT BUT overlooked aspect of running a hospital is appropriate documentation of a patient's treatment. This benefits not just the patient, but also the hospital because flawed documentation means revenue lost.

To improve the accuracy of documentation, East Jefferson has created the Teaming for Documentation Integrity, or TDI Team.

In the past, a patient would receive care for whatever he or she needed right away, but documentation would be com-

pleted much later. With TDI, the documentation takes place immediately.

"Instead of waiting to do it on the back end, we're doing a concurrent review," said Royceanne Fugler, a registered nurse and clinical documentation specialist.

Documentation used to be done by coders, people without the medical expertise of nurses. All of the TDI members — Fugler, Lindy Sells and Melissa Mayer — are RNs and clinical documentation specialists.

"The nurses can make clinical judgments, whereas coders could not. ... Nurses can make clinical decisions on what to ask the physician," said Stacy Collins, director of health information management at East Jefferson.

"If we see oversights in the medical records, we can point those out. We're an objective eye," Mayer said.

Why is this so important? To be reimbursed for Medicare costs, the hospital must list every aspect of diagnosis and treatment. In the past, if a patient was treated for an injury as the primary ailment, but simul-

taneously for an infection as a secondary ailment, the injury would be listed but not the infection. As a result, the hospital would be reimbursed only for treating the injury.

Even though the program has been in place for less than a year, East Jefferson has increased reimbursement for its Medicare population by \$1.1 million since December. The more accurate documentation also helps physicians from being audited.

If the documentation is wrong and a doctor said he treated two things but the hospital was only reimbursed for one, then that doctor is susceptible to an audit. The TDI Team aims to eliminate that hassle for doctors.

While the hospital said the program has already been successful, East Jefferson plans to add more nurses to the program and roll it out to other insurance companies that pay by Diagnostic Related Group. •

— Fritz Esker

ThermoSuit System

Ochsner Health System

Key innovation: ThermoSuit System reduces body temperature in cardiac arrest and heart attack patients
Where they're based: New Orleans
Top executive: Dr. Christopher White, chairman of cardiology
Year introduced: 2008

DR. PAUL McMULLAN, an interventional cardiologist at Ochsner Medical Center, has written the protocol that resulted in a U.S. Food and Drug Administration clinical trial that will begin later this year at Ochsner.

The trial's goal is to prove that the ThermoSuit System, a special, external, noninvasive cooling system, can reduce the body temperature of heart attack patients.

Since 2005, the use of hypothermia has been approved by the FDA and recommended by the American Heart Association for reducing brain damage for cardiac arrest patients. Ochsner's cardiology department has pursued using hypothermia since the beginning of this year, when it acquired the ThermoSuit System.

Since published reports in 2002 detailed the benefits of hypothermia in animal trials, scientists have tried several methods to cool patients, including intravenous cold saline, ice packs and even a blanket filled with channels that pump cold water against the skin. Most of these methods take so long to cool down a person that the benefits couldn't be achieved, McMullan said.

When the ThermoSuit System, developed by Life Recovery Systems HD of New Jersey, went on the market last year, it achieved results in 30 minutes or less, McMullan said.

"ThermoSuit is able to cool the body down much more quickly than other devices out there, in some cases, as fast as 20 minutes," McMullan said. The time the suit takes to work varies according to person's size and body temperature.

"It's like an inflatable kiddie pool, only long and oval, in the shape of a person," McMullan said. "The person is placed in it, and water is circulated by an external pump."

McMullan believes the same cooling-down treatment that has proven beneficial to cardiac arrest patients will also help heart attack patients. Before a national trial can be approved, the FDA requires proof the ThermoSuit will actually cool people down and that practitioners can apply the standard of care to the cooled patients.

"We know we can cool people off, but we have to show proof we can incorporate hypothermia in our heart attack standard of care," McMullan said. "After we prove this, the next step is to design a randomized, national control trial with multiple participants."

"To my knowledge, Ochsner is the only medical center in the New Orleans area to aggressively use hypothermia treatment for cardiac arrest patients," McMullan said. "In the past six months we have been using it, we have seen dramatic results in reducing brain damage. Now we want to prove that heart attack effects can also be lessened with hypothermia."•

— Angelle Bergeron



PHOTO BY FRANK AYAMAMI

Dr. Paul McMullan, an interventional cardiologist at Ochsner Medical Center, demonstrates the body cooling effects of the ThermoSuit System on Dr. Rohit Amin.



PHOTO BY FRANK AYMANI

Arc of Greater New Orleans controller Vance Levesque, second from right, takes a break from sorting beads with, from left, Terri Hingle, Randy Borne, Dawn Garfield and Jeff Regan.

Arc of Greater New Orleans

Key innovation: system for collecting and recycling Mardi Gras beads
Biggest suppliers: area universities, high school and civic groups
Where they're based: New Orleans
Top executive: Cliff Doescher, executive director
Year introduced: 1953
2007 figures: more than 30 tons of beads recycled; more than 50 tons projected for this year

VANCE LEVESQUE, CONTROLLER of the Arc of Greater New Orleans, has discovered something many New Orleanians have pondered over for years: a way to make boxed-up Mardi Gras beads resourceful.

A “born and raised” New Orleans native, Levesque combined his involvement in the Sierra Club with his

dedication to Arc of Greater New Orleans to make the art of collecting beads green.

“I joined the Sierra Club in 1995, and I learned all about recycling and what it means to go green,” he said. “(It) was the place where I learned ... how we need to be responsible for helping our communities be a better place to live.”

For many years, the nonprofit Arc has been soliciting Mardi Gras beads to provide piecework opportunities for adults with disabilities, whose caregivers thought they were too disabled to enter the work force. The organization has since eliminated its piecework practice and, instead, employs people with intellectual disabilities within the organization’s overall work force.

Levesque also has expanded Arc to area universities, including Tulane, the University of New Orleans, Louisiana State University and Dillard University.

“Tulane University has made a major effort into recycling,” he said, “and in May of 2008, they put recycling bins in all of the dorms and collected over 6,000 pounds

of beads as students left for the summer.”

AmeriCorps has also joined the effort by sending youth volunteers to help with recycling the past two summers, and a local Boy Scout has made recycling beads his Eagle Scout project.

“Vance has been very active in the local chapter of the Sierra Club and has combined that interest — passion — with opportunities available at Arc to help us get started on a green path,” said executive director Cliff Doescher, adding that the recycled-bead project has inspired them to convert other operations, such as janitorial services and grounds and landscaping, to green processes.

Arc also recycles newspapers, cell phones and ink jet cartridges. They are in the process of rebuilding their sustainable organic garden to grow herbs and vegetables for their Vintage Garden Kitchen, which has just begun to serve healthy soups to the community. •

— Amy Ferrara Smith



PHOTO BY TRACIE MORRIS SCHAEFER

Frank Delaney, program director for the Campaign to Build a Teen-Friendly New Orleans and Kimberly Byas-Dilosa, founder and executive director, unpack T-shirts for a recent event as program director Ted Stevenson fields calls.

Campaign to Rebuild a Teen-Friendly Greater New Orleans

Key innovation: calling on companies that profit from

teen spending to invest in young people

Biggest clients: the 150 youth active in the program and the thousands of youth attending outreach events

Where they're based: New Orleans

Top executive: Kimberly Byas-Dilosa, founder and adult adviser

Year introduced: 2006

2007 funding received: \$293,184

MANY PARENTS, CLERGY, EDUCATORS and law enforcement officials have lamented discouraging statistics regarding New Orleans' teenagers, working to curb problems that seemingly never end.

Enter New Orleans native Kimberly Byas-Dilosa and the Campaign to Rebuild a Teen-Friendly Greater New Orleans, which is calling on corporations that benefit from teen spending to invest in their success.

Since teenagers spent \$189 billion nationwide last year

on such things as fast food, electronics, clothing and soft drinks, why not get such manufacturers to invest in teens, a strong source of their revenue?

"We're just kind of introducing the city to not only another source of revenue but another way you can attract children to the city," Byas-Dilosa said. Just as the city's reputation for fun attracts adults, a reputation for being teen-friendly will attract youth.

Byas-Dilosa and the teens she serves have spent the past two years laying the groundwork for the campaign under the umbrella of her 10-year-old Youthanasia Foundation. The campaign's official kick-off was Aug. 29, the third anniversary of Hurricane Katrina.

The campaign's goal is to reach 250 teen-friendly companies within the next year, using donations to engage teens in healthy, constructive, fun activities to secure their success and help them avoid pitfalls such as teen pregnancy, illegal drug use and abandonment of educational and career goals. The campaign seeks to reduce the recidivism rate at juvenile detention centers and keep students positively engaged during after-school hours.

Byas-Dilosa already has launched www.teenfriendly-no.com, where residents have donated about \$25,000. Corporate sponsorships and grants have totaled more than \$290,000 since the campaign's inception, including a catapulting \$120,000 from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, \$75,000 from the Louisiana Recovery Corps and \$45,000 from the Louisiana Department of Education.

The Final Fridayz campaign, a series of teen productions held the last Friday of each month, involved teens in programs such as talent shows, poetry slams and hip-hop hair shows. With public attendance, Final Fridayz also serves as a marketing venue for teen-friendly companies' products.

The campaign's Post Prom Party Series kicked off this year, giving teens a fun, safe party alternative.

Perhaps most importantly, the campaign engages the same young people who helped conceptualize and plan the events.

"It's their ideas coming together and being put into reality," Byas-Dilosa said. •

— Diana Chandler

Latino Apostolate of the Episcopal Church

Key innovation: conversational English language classes
Biggest clients: migrant workers
Where they're based: New Orleans
Top executive: Jamie McDaniel, director of social services
Year introduced: 2008

WHEN AN INFLUX of Hispanics arrived in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina to help in the rebuilding, Jamie McDaniel knew the city would have a need for new services.

Having volunteered in Guatemala after college, she began tutoring a few Hispanic workers in English. Her goal was to help them become more productive members of the community and to provide them with access to social services. Teaching wherever she could — sometimes on porches, sometimes outdoors in the Ninth Ward — she set up shop at St. Anna's Episcopal Church on Esplanade Avenue and word began to spread.

"We had a huge amount of interest," McDaniel said. "More than 30 and 40 people started showing up regularly and so we expanded to every weeknight."

McDaniel said that because many people attending the classes have little or no formal educational background, she uses a softer teaching style instead of total immersion. She focuses on phrases and words students will need to use in their daily lives and balances that with building blocks such as grammar, vocabulary, structure and sentences.

"We think that is something that distinguishes what we do. We vary student by student, but it's a pretty soft introduction. We try to get people to express themselves in English as best as possible."

Brazilian native Claudemir Garvin has been in the United States for five years but said he has had a difficult time learning English. Garvin, an electrician, started taking classes at the Apostolate in January and has seen significant improvements in his English language skills.

"I've never taken a class before, just started this year. I try learning English every day, and it's important for us to know it, even in my own country," Garvin said.

McDaniel began offering other services on a case-by-case basis such as interpretations and help for dealing with legal documents and health care needs. The program continued to grow and soon had three levels of classes. It was eventually turned into a ministry of the church and given funding from St. Anna's.

In May, the church hired a Spanish-speaking deacon and began offering worship services in Spanish after the classes. McDaniel has plans to work with other area churches and would like to offer more social services and educational programs in computers and health. •

— Craig Guillot



St. Anna's Episcopal Church social services director Jamie McDaniel, center, meets with Latino Apostolate of the Episcopal Church clients, clockwise from McDaniel, Antonio Rivas, Felicitas Uriarte, Claudio Fuentes and Reino Pena.

Louisiana ArtWorks

Key innovation: a nonprofit contemporary arts space with 19 resident studios
Biggest clients: contemporary visual artists
Where they're based: New Orleans
Top executive: Shirley Trusty Corey, CEO
Year introduced: residency program began in June

AFTER A DECADE OF planning, construction and fundraising, Louisiana ArtWorks is finally realizing its vision — the nonprofit contemporary arts space welcomed the first wave of artist residents in June.

“There’s been a tremendous outcry and a tremendous excitement that’s in the air. This is a building that many people thought had sunk. They didn’t think we were going to be able to get this building up and running,” director Joy Glidden said.

With 93,000 square feet, 19 resident studios and resources for everything from glass-working to printmaking, the size and scope of Louisiana ArtWorks is unprecedented in the state. Glidden said there’s nothing quite like ArtWorks anywhere else in the country.

The residency program is designed to cater to post-graduate artists who may not have the resources to continue their work after finishing school.

“There are 11 universities in the vicinity — if you include LSU — six of which have B.A., M.S.A. and M.A. programs in visual arts, so you have a tremendous amount of visual artists coming out of the area but couldn’t necessarily stay and see a full career occur,” Glidden said.

The program also serves to retain some of the state’s best contemporary artists. ArtWorks residents are required to have lived in Louisiana for at least three years before applying.

“We’re trying to entice people to come back, so a lot of our (admissions) decision-making this time around was related to Katrina,” Glidden said. “That was one of our main prerogatives, to make sure that people had space to do their work.”

In addition to the range of services it provides for its artists, ArtWorks is also unique in that it invites the public to interact with the artists in their workspaces.

“The actual building lends itself completely to the idea of the public interfacing and viewing the artist while they work, thereby opening the dialogue, thereby opening the inquiries, the questions,” Glidden said.

These types of personal interactions, Glidden said, often increase the viewer’s appreciation of the art.

“With more sophisticated projects, (such as) minimalism or conceptual pieces or the stuff that’s a little harder to grasp because it’s not figurative, that requires a dialogue; it requires an artist talking about exactly about what’s going on and what the direction is.”•

— Leah Bartos



PHOTO BY FRANK AYAMI

Louisiana ArtWorks, led by director Joy Glidden, started accepting artists for its resident studios in June.



PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAN

Jerome "PopAgee" Johnson, who plans to restore the Eagle Saloon as the New Orleans Music Hall of Fame to highlight the city's jazz heritage, plays drums with Mervin "Kid Merv" Campbell.

New Orleans Music Hall of Fame

Key innovation: turning building deemed "the birthplace of jazz" into a museum to showcase New Orleans' jazz history

Where they're based: New Orleans

Top executive: Jerome "PopAgee" Johnson, founder and CEO

Year introduced: 1981, acquired 501(c)(3) nonprofit status in 2002

2007 donations received: \$700,000

MARKETING NEW ORLEANS as the birthplace of jazz seems second nature, but restoring the history of that birth on South Rampart Street is under way at the New Orleans Music Hall of Fame.

Founder and CEO Jerome "PopAgee" Johnson plans to restore the Eagle Saloon at 401 S. Rampart St. to its former stature, recalling the early jazz days of such musical forefathers as Louis Armstrong, Charles "Buddy" Bolden and Ferdinand

"Jelly Roll" Morton, who performed at the nightclub.

"Here we are the birthplace of jazz and have so little to show for it," Johnson said.

His vision extends beyond the address to include a family-friendly tourist destination and a cultural district with restaurants, theaters, concert halls and housing for musicians.

"This whole area is going to be incredible," Johnson said. "If you look beyond the parking lots, you can see what I'm seeing."

Johnson confesses a determination and vision for a project he considers "anointed" but doesn't take all of the credit for work done.

"It was a lot of folks other than myself who realized the importance of this building," he said. "The whole world loves jazz and the whole world loves New Orleans. This building is where it all started."

The Eagle Saloon was built in 1875 and is distinguished by the Smithsonian American Art Museum as America's Birthplace of Jazz.

Johnson acquired the saloon in November 2007 and has worked since then to secure development plans. In August,

he was looking to start accepting construction bids on the work, having gotten the building plans approved.

The three-story building will comprise a living museum on the first floor, exhibits focusing on historic musicians on the second floor and a community hall on the third floor, which also will accommodate special events.

Johnson plans to create an atmosphere allowing the public to step back in time and see what Armstrong and his contemporaries experienced, complete with characters in period attire.

He hopes to eventually acquire additional property near the saloon, including the old Karnofsky Pawn Shop and the Iroquois Theater.

The lengthy process of bringing the project to fruition has gained financial support from the state of Louisiana, the city of New Orleans and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, with Johnson investing his own funds as well.

"It's a very slow process," he said. "A lot of this project has been moved by me with personal money." •

— Diana Chandler

Puentes New Orleans/LatiNola

Key innovation: an organization geared toward building a strong and unified Latino community

Biggest clients: the Latino population of greater New Orleans

Where they're based: New Orleans

Top executive: Lucas Diaz, founder and executive director

Year introduced: incorporated in April 2007

WHEN LUCAS DIAZ looks at New Orleans, he sees an international city. But in addition to the very visible influences hailing from French, Spanish, African, Caribbean, Italian, Irish cultures and many in between, there is one influential group he believes has been systemically overlooked — Latinos.

Diaz is the founder and executive director of Puentes New Orleans, a nonprofit geared toward integrating the Latino population into city planning and the New Orleans community.

Once that happens, Diaz said, New Orleans can then call itself a truly international city.

“New Orleans has all the assets in place and the community is welcoming that way,” Diaz said. “There’s always going to be sections of the community that won’t work together. . . . But I’m finding people who do want to work together and I’m putting them together.”

Diaz, who immigrated at age 8 with his family from the Dominican Republic, said Latinos have been living in New Orleans long before the 2005 hurricanes, adding that Puentes caters to recent immigrants and native Latinos.

“The goal is to help them be more active, more successful and be participants in what’s happening rather than being on the sidelines of everything,” he said. “Only a handful of Latinos that were in the right circles were not on the sidelines, but what Puentes is saying is more Latinos need to be on the mainline.”

Puentes is working toward this harmony using a number of focuses, which include helping people secure affordable housing, improving public safety and relations with the criminal justice system, and community organizing through its LatiNola program.

Diaz believes the potential for functional, diverse communities in New Orleans can set a precedent for communities nationwide.

“It’s a very local thing, but I think it has a lot of implications for people from other places that want to see how different communities can live together, because that’s always a challenge across North America,” Diaz said.

“In New Orleans, when it works, and sometimes it doesn’t work — we had Jim Crow and we still have the legacy of that — but when it does work, you see really beautiful things between people of different ethnicities working and living together and being very comfortable with each other, which you don’t see too often in the rest of the United States.” •

— Leah Bartos



Puentes New Orleans executive director Lucas Diaz, center, reviews plans with Jonathon Kim, left, and Jimmy Huck for the group’s LatiNola community organization.



PHOTO BY FRANK ATMANI

Tipitina's Music Office Co-Op technical director Todd Souvignier, left, and board member Dean Dupuy have helped create a statewide network of work force development and technology centers for musicians, as well as artists in films and digital media.

Tipitina's Music Office Co-Op

Key innovation: a statewide network of work force development and technology access centers for people in music, film and digital media
Biggest client: musicians statewide
Where they're based: New Orleans
Top executive: Roland Von Kurnitowski, owner of Tipitina's and founder of Tipitina's Foundation Inc.
Year introduced: October 2003

MAKING IT IN the music business requires a lot more than talent. It requires business and marketing skills and access to technology many artists can't afford.

Thanks to the Tipitina's Music Office Co-Op, musicians, as well as artists in film and digital media, can access a statewide network of work force development and technology centers that offer a unique economic development opportunity for creative entrepreneurs.

"Being a talented performer, having a good voice and being able to write a song ... that and 50 cents will get

you a cup of coffee," said Todd Souvignier, technical director of the Tipitina's Foundation Inc.

The fact is, in a city that has built an international reputation on its music culture, many musicians live in poverty, earning an average annual income of \$15,800 for a household of 2.5, Souvignier said.

"The co-op offers one proven, tangible way of reversing that trend one artist/entrepreneur at a time."

Since the co-op formed in October 2003, its 1,200 members statewide have reported significant increases in their income.

"The average increase among members who reported music income, after using the co-op for a year, was in the range of 28 percent to 30 percent pre-Katrina, and 9 percent post-Katrina," Souvignier said. "That 9 percent is still a pretty good revenue increase in a downturn market."

Scott Aiges, director of programs, marketing and communications for the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation and former head of the New Orleans Mayor's Music Office, conceived the program.

The co-op is supported largely by the Tipitina's

Foundation, a New Orleans-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit that supports Louisiana's music culture. The state funds roughly one-third of the co-op's annual budget, but that is scheduled to gradually decline until the co-op is self-supportive by 2010, Souvignier said.

At co-op locations in New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Shreveport and Alexandria, members have access to the Internet and office equipment, as well as the latest technology to support music, film and digital media.

After Hurricane Katrina, the co-op was a "durable and useful platform" for members to re-establish their business connections, retrieve mail, use computers and connect with other people, Souvignier said.

"We helped pre-screen people for housing and things like that," Souvignier said. "If we can provide a platform not just for our members but for other nonprofits that serve our members, how cool is that?"

Three new co-op locations will open soon: in Lafayette later this year, and Lake Charles and Monroe in 2009. •

— Angelle Bergeron



PHOTO BY FRANK AYAMI

Urban League of Greater New Orleans Young Professionals members include, from left, Michelle Craig, Peter Hamilton, Jason Burns, Jade Brown Russell and Jared Brossett.

Urban League of Greater New Orleans Young Professionals

Key innovation: providing a hub of resources for young professionals ages 21 to 44 to network and refine their skills

Biggest clients: professionals ages 21 to 44

Where they're based: New Orleans

Top executive: Jade Brown Russell and Michelle Craig, co-founders

Year introduced: 2008

"BRAIN DRAIN" IS A TERM employers in New Orleans know too well — as Hurricane Katrina's waters began to subside, the city's work force went right along with them.

Two attorneys from Adams and Reese law firm are doing their part to fill what they, and many others, saw as a void in post-Katrina New Orleans: a young, invigorated work force to revive the city.

Jade Brown Russell and Michelle Craig started the Young Professionals chapter of the Urban League of Greater New Orleans to cater to professionals ages 21 to 44. The chapter is a hub of resources for these people, giving them an opportunity to network, refine their skills and extend their knowledge to the community.

"We know that we had a deep need for young professionals in our demographic to step up and take a hold of the city's recovery on a professional level," said Russell, who is also president of the chapter. "Our main focus is building and refining young professionals, coupled with ... caring for the mission of the larger (Urban League) organization, which is to address the needs of the community."

The two launched the chapter in 2008 with a kick-off event at the New Orleans Museum of Art. It only had 10 members but has grown to more than 100.

Besides having social and networking events, seminars and hosting professional speakers, the nonprofit uses its

funds for community initiatives. The upcoming Young Professionals University program will have members coaching disadvantaged 11th- and 12th-graders on job skills. In conjunction with Coca-Cola, the Young Professionals will sponsor the Rebuild and Refresh Community School Tour, where they will tour New Orleans high schools and educate students on professionalism.

Russell gauges the chapter's success through the number of members it has and the number of programs it sponsors — both of which are growing. As an organization that focuses on the New Orleans community, its needs will determine the future of the Young Professionals.

"We'll grow as the community grows, and address the needs for the community as they present themselves," she said. "New Orleans is on the cusp, really. It is a unique time, a great opportunity as young professionals to step in and play a part in the city recovering."•

— Katie Urbaszewski

CJ Creations

Key innovation: the “Sit Me Safe” safety seat for children that covers the average waiting room chair
Biggest client: still waiting for one
Where they’re based: Slidell
Top executive: Steve and Jimmie Kaye Hanberg
2007 sales: Hanberg said it was negligible. He’s only sold a few of the chair covers

GO TO ANY DOCTOR’S office, bank, restaurant or school and you are sure to find them — unassuming, multipurpose stackable chairs with a flimsy back and little side protection.

Although they provide a high level of convenience to the user, the chair poses a problem for parents with young children, since there is no specific way to adequately and safely seat a curious and active child.

Faced with this problem himself, Steve Hanberg and his wife, Jimmie Kaye, put their minds together and came up with the “Sit Me Safe” chair cover, a cushioned covering with harness that can secure any child.

“The inspiration for the whole idea came from my daughter,” Hanberg said. “Whenever we would take her with us to a place with a waiting room, we would always find her climbing all over the chair and falling through the side handles. We knew there had to be something to protect her, and this cover does it.”

Armed with his idea, Hanberg scoured the Internet to see if there was a legitimate market for this kind of chair cover.

“There is a huge market for something like this,” Hanberg said. “Offices, restaurants, even places of worship use the chairs regularly because they are so versatile.”

With the help of his wife, a seamstress by trade, Hanberg designed a prototype chair cover. After applying for a patent in 2003, the couple finally received confirmation that their idea was an original one.

“That was the biggest hurdle we have had to jump,” he said. “The patent process is extremely meticulous, and our lawyer said earning it was an accomplishment in itself.”

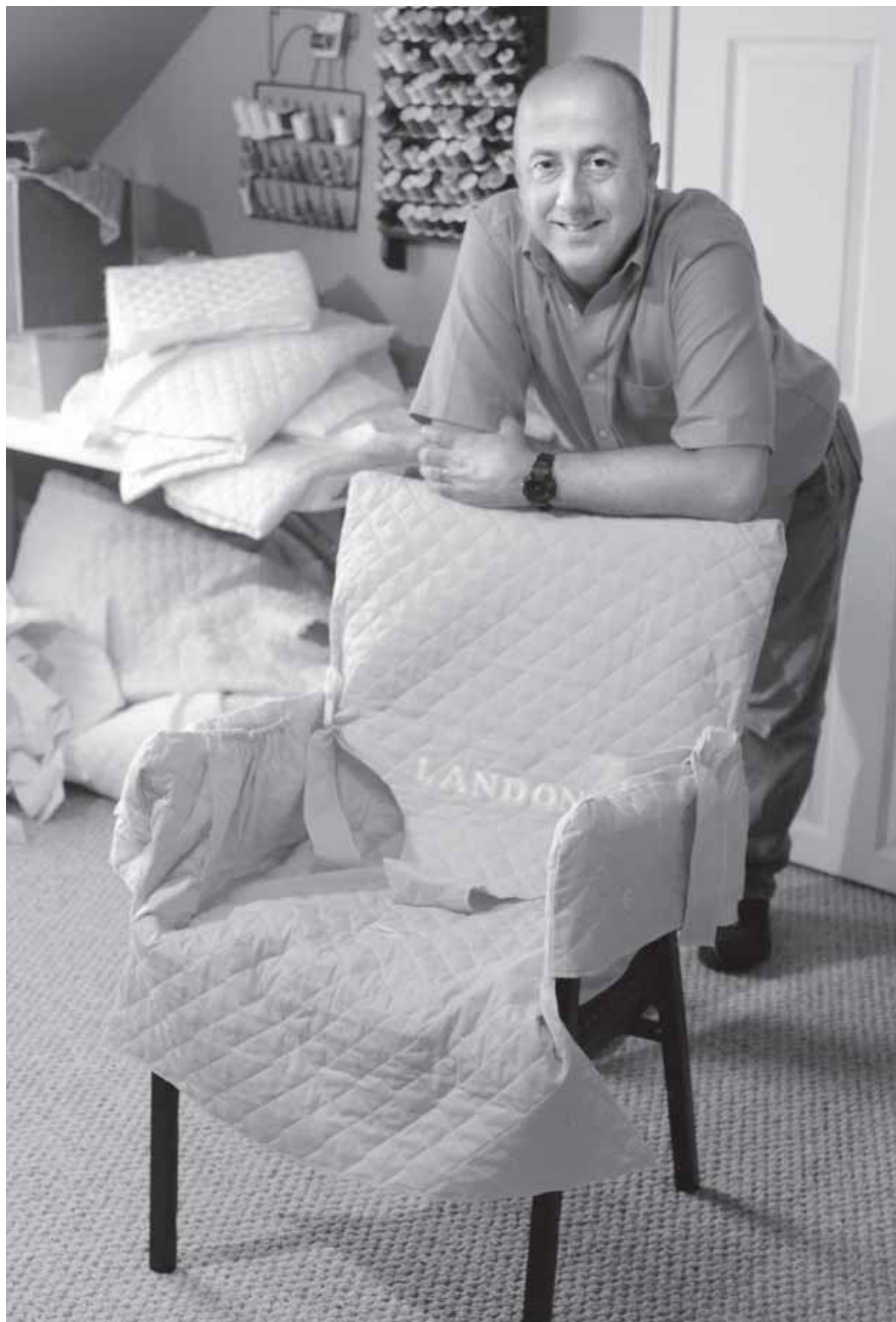
The chair cover uses two thin layers of quilted fabric with a layer of padding in between. It also features a restraint buckle much like a car safety seat.

“The chair creates an environment where they can sit and be safe,” said Hanberg. “If the child is comfortable, they are happy. This makes the mom or the dad happy.”

Now that he has a patent, Hanberg said his next step is to target manufacturers of stackable chairs to see if they are interested in incorporating the “Sit Me Safe” cover in their design. Hanberg said the only marketing he and his wife have done has been through word of mouth.

“All of the guys I work with have seen it and really like it,” Hanberg said. “I also remember the first time we used the chair in public someone approached us with amazement by how unique our idea was. I think this chair could be the next best thing since the stroller.”•

— Robin Shannon



Steve Hanberg created the Sit Me Safe safety seat cover to prevent children from slipping out of or hurting themselves on waiting room chairs.



PHOTO BY FRANK AYMANI

Allison Wasserman, with business partner Elizabeth Rothbeind, runs a Web site that allows women to sell jewelry of relationships that have gone bad.

ex-cessories.com

Key innovation: online boutique for women and men to sell unwanted jewelry, often from an ex

Where they're based: New Orleans

Top executive: Allison Wasserman, based in New Orleans, and Elizabeth Rothbeind, based in Winter Park, Fla.

Year introduced: 2008

IT IS NOT VERY often two business students are able to take an idea from a class assignment and develop a growing business model. Elizabeth Rothbeind and Allison Wasserman, who were seeking master's degrees in business administration at Rollins College in Florida, did just that.

Recognizing the potential of an untapped market for unwanted, high-end jewelry because of a failed romance, Rothbeind and Wasserman launched ex-cessories in April.

With the slogan, "Don't get mad ... break even," the co-

owners initially targeted women who were looking to unload jewelry, mainly engagement rings, which were a reminder of love lost. Initially the idea was for women to capitalize on their misfortune by exchanging the token of jewelry for a profit.

"We were really dealing with our own personal lives and we realized there was a need for this sort of thing, having a lot of jewelry collecting dust. We knew we weren't the only people with this issue," said Wasserman, who returned to New Orleans after graduation and handles all of the jewelry.

People send their unwanted jewelry to Wasserman and Rothbeind, who have the jewelry appraised and upload pictures to the Web site. Because there is no bidding, interested buyers can browse the merchandise as if they were shopping at a boutique.

Rothbeind, who oversees the Web site and lives in Winter Park, Fla., said the two started with just 30 pieces of jewelry in April and now have more than 135 pieces listed.

After a few months in business, the target market changed. The duo realized women weren't the only ones

looking to unload reminders of broken engagements. Men who had previous marriages or past relationships were also interested in exchanging their jewelry for a financial return.

"As the business launched and we got more exposure, it sort of took a different direction. We now have an older target than initially expected. Married women who have upgraded their engagement rings are now among our customer base," Wasserman said.

"And men," added Rothbeind. "We now have an entire section dedicated to men's jewelry on our Web site."

Although neither will reveal actual revenues, they say the growing market helped them see a profit after just three months in business. And the two can't always predict how fast the merchandise will sell.

"We tell people we can't even give an average time or turnaround for selling their jewelry. We sold a \$5,000 piece in one week and it took a few months for a \$4,000 piece to sell. It's really about connecting a good buyer and seller," Rothbeind said. •

— Abby Kral

Green Door Construction

Key innovation: The only company in the city to use aerated autoclaved concrete, a pre-fabricated concrete block that is lighter, more fireproof and a better insulator than common concrete.

Biggest client: Samuel Green Charter School — and his parents' Uptown home

Where they're based: New Orleans

Top executive: Patrick Ibert

Year introduced: 2006

2007 sales: \$600,000

AMERICANS HAVE become aware of the necessity to be more energy efficient, and in most cases consumers are more mindful about what they drive, where they shop and what they buy.

Patrick Ibert of Green Door Construction has taken this philosophy and applied it to the materials he uses in

his construction business.

"We are the only contractor in the city that uses aerated autoclaved concrete for building projects," Ibert said. "It is a pre-fabricated concrete block that is lighter than common concrete, more fireproof and a better insulator."

Ibert said the AAC blocks are manufactured from lime, sand or mine tailings, along with cement, gypsum, an aeration agent and water. The concoction is poured into a cast, which produces a solid block that is interlocking and stackable.

"The blocks are a product of Europe," Ibert said. "They have unbelievable versatility and are so easy to use."

Ibert said the blocks can be sawed, drilled, nailed and routed using normal woodworking tools. The blocks do a better job of dampening noise than standard concrete and are much more environmentally friendly, he said.

"They are manufactured from readily available natural resources," Ibert said. "The materials are nontoxic and not a source of indoor air pollution. Less jobsite waste is created, and the product is completely recyclable."

Ibert has used the AAC blocks to help Samuel Green Charter in New Orleans build three outdoor classrooms, as well as its edible schoolyard. His biggest client as of late, however, is within the family.

"I'm rebuilding my parent's ancestral home in the Garden District, which burned to the ground during Hurricane Katrina," Ibert said. "The project calls for a complete retrofit of the 100-year-old home to make it more energy efficient while keeping the historic aspects of the home intact. A person's home is their single greatest asset, and our goal is to make our construction functional and aesthetically pleasing."

Ibert said the new home will be more energy efficient and should hold up better to the elements. The new home will include solar panels for self-sustaining energy and will be pest-, fire- and mold-resistant.

"I hope it will be the perfect home for the New Orleans climate."•

— Robin Shannon



Patrick Ibert has used his aerated autoclaved concrete blocks for Samuel Green Charter School's three outdoor classrooms and in renovating his parents' Garden District home.

HIV Research

Tulane University National Primate Research Center

Key innovation: development of a gel to prevent transmission of HIV in women

Biggest client: patients in developing countries

Where they're based: Covington

Top executive: Andrew Lackner, director

Year introduced: in development

THE STATISTICS ARE staggering: Since the discovery of AIDS in 1981, 25 million people have died of the disease worldwide, according to Avert.org.

Since that time, doctors and researchers have worked to control and someday eradicate what has become one of the world's greatest epidemics.

Dr. Ronald Veazey, an AIDS researcher since 1994, is testing a potential breakthrough in the prevention of HIV designed specifically for women at the Tulane University National Primate Research Center in Covington. Macaque monkeys are being used to test a microbicide gel called a fusion inhibitor that could be applied topically to the vagina.

Veazey said a fusion inhibitor is a drug that prevents the virus from attaching to or entering human cells.

"HIV attaches to and enters cells through a two-step process that involves the binding of very specific molecules on the virus with molecules on the host cell, kind of like a 'lock and key' mechanism," Veazey said. "This is why HIV only infects primates and not mice, rabbits or other animals."

He said that is why the macaques are necessary to study the interactions of the virus with the vagina and other tissues.

"Only the molecules on the cells of primates have the correct molecular structure allowing HIV to attach to them," Veazey said.

Public health officials have long called for an HIV prevention method that would be completely under a woman's control.

"We are targeting patients in developing countries, where the HIV epidemic is spreading the fastest," Veazey said. "There are areas where condom use is either discouraged or not an option due to male-dominated societies, religious beliefs or other reasons."

But the gel won't be on the market for at least five years, maybe longer, Veazey said.

"We simply performed a preclinical study showing that it protects monkeys from HIV transmission. Now it has to get in line with a number of other compounds for approval to perform clinical safety trials in humans, or Phase 1 and 2 trials, and then after it is proven safe, there will be large-scale Phase 3 trials, which usually take years to complete."•

— Lisa Bacques



Dr. Ronald Veazey, an AIDS researcher with Tulane University's National Primate Research Center in Covington, is working on a gel that could prevent the virus from attaching to or attacking human cells.

PHOTO BY SHANNON DIECIDUE

Human Angiogenesis Assay

Key innovation: a more customized treatment of cancer through an analysis of a patient's blood vessels
Biggest client: graduate medical students
Where they're based: New Orleans
Top executive: Dr. Eugene Woltering, lead researcher
Year introduced: in development

DOCTORS OFTEN WORK at a disadvantage when they consider treatment options for a patient with a tumor. The reason is simple: Judgments are often based on how rodents with tumors have responded to a given therapy, not the individual patient in question.

But those options will soon be enhanced by substantially more reliable data with the introduction of the Human Angiogenesis Assay, a technology specifically designed to support a more customized treatment of cancer through an analysis of a patient's blood vessels.

"This means that we will be able to tell you what exactly your tumor is doing and not make assumptions based on a mouse's tumor or what is going on with the tumor of someone else," said Dr. Eugene Woltering, the James D. Rives Professor of Surgery and Neurosciences at the Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center in New Orleans.

Woltering, who has filed nearly 20 patents relating to diagnostic and therapeutic discoveries, has also been granted patent protection for the Human Angiogenesis Assay, which came about after years of studying the blood vessels.

"In the fetus or children, there is an abundant amount of blood vessels that grow. But in an adult, blood vessel formation is never normal unless you are a female going through the menstrual cycle," Woltering said.

That made the study of blood vessels for Woltering and his fellow researchers, which includes two other doctors and three post-graduates, difficult until they considered what happens to the typical placenta.

"When a woman delivers and both the mom and baby are OK, the placenta typically ends up in a garbage can. So we decided to harvest those placentas and dissect the blood vessels out of them."

By so doing, Woltering and his fellow researchers were able to study more closely how such vessels respond to a variety of treatments and drugs.

"It used to be that one drug fit all," Woltering said. "But now we can screen an individual tumor responding to 20 different drugs and find out exactly the combination that will work best. And that is very much a step in the right direction."•

— Garry Boulard



PHOTO BY FRANK AYAMAMI

Dr. Eugene Woltering, a professor of surgery and neurosciences at the Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center, is working to customize treatment of cancer by analyzing a patient's blood vessels.



PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAKI

David Coy, a research professor at the Tulane University School of Medicine, has created a weekly injection therapy for Type 2 diabetes patients that is in drug trials.

Peptide Research Lab

Tulane University

Key innovation: Taspoglutide, a once-weekly injection therapy for Type 2 diabetes

Biggest clients: pharmaceutical companies

Where they're based: New Orleans

Top executive: David Coy, director of Tulane University's Peptide Research Lab

Year introduced: in development

AS SHORT POLYMERS forming the linking of amino acids, peptides aren't on the minds of most people these days.

For David Coy, a research professor at the Tulane University School of Medicine and director of Tulane's Peptide Research Lab, peptides have the potential to create groundbreaking medicines. Coy has patented a promising new diabetes therapy now in large, multicenter drug trials by one of the world's biggest biotech companies.

Tulane researchers and the French pharmaceutical firm Ipsen SA collaborated on the drug tentatively called Taspoglutide, a once-a-week injection therapy. It is based on GLP-1 analogue peptides that lower blood sugar and help with weight loss in patients with Type 2 diabetes. Coy said insulin has a number of bad side effects when patients take it daily for a number of years, and the new drug might provide an alternative.

"The thing about these GLP-1 peptides is that they should enable people to stay off of insulin for much longer periods," Coy said. "These are in effect naturally increasing insulin levels and one could even use this in a prediabetic condition and not go on daily insulin therapy."

At a recent American Diabetes Association meeting in San Francisco, Roche and Ipsen executives said Taspoglutide "has the potential to be a best-in-class treatment for Type 2 diabetes."

The drug is considered the most advanced of seven diabetes drugs that Roche has in development, and Tulane

would earn royalties from sales if the new diabetes drug is approved. Similar drugs have worldwide sales exceeding \$200 million, and patent holders receive anywhere from 1 percent to 5 percent. Having started the research in the mid-'90s, Coy said the process of getting a drug to the market can be very slow.

"With all drugs and approval processes, it takes an incredible amount of time. Even at the end of phase three, which could happen as early as next year, you have to file for FDA approval," Coy said.

The lab has two other patented peptide drugs have reached the market: Decapetyl, a drug for prostate cancer, and Lanreotide, a treatment for a rare endocrine disorder that causes gigantism. Coy said that because the human body makes thousands of peptides and they are used in many processes, they allow researchers to go into many areas of medicine. Peptide research, he said, offers the potential for new drugs. •

— Craig Guillot

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Precast Building Solutions

Key innovation: constructing specially engineered homes of premade concrete panels
Where they're based: New Orleans
Top executive: Brian Opert, CEO
Year introduced: 2006

SICKENED BY THE loss of more than 200,000 residential homes because of Hurricane Katrina, Brian Opert felt compelled to offer New Orleanians a better way to survive the next storm.

"We are the only country in the world that still builds out of wood, and it's simply not practical," said Opert, who established Precast Building Solutions to construct specially engineered homes made of precast concrete panels.

Built to exceed current international building code

standards, PBS homes are hurricane-, tornado-, flood-, fire-, termite-, mold-, rot-, vermin- and even bulletproof, Opert said. The basic design of PBS homes is like a tornado-safe house in that the floors and ceilings, as well as the walls, are comprised of precast concrete panels able to withstand 500 mph winds.

The home is completed with three-paned system impact-resistant windows and a roof that is a sealed insulated panel system consisting of urethane foam sandwiched between two steel panels. All utilities, such as the hot water heater and air conditioning system, are between the roof and the ceiling so they won't flood and can be easily accessed.

Because it's made of concrete, the home is more eco-friendly and energy efficient, Opert said.

"Concrete doesn't absorb and release energy as quickly as wood, so it's like a wine cellar — cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter," he said.

Additionally, an average stick-built house would require sacrificing 28 or more trees, he said. New Orleans

city code requires the use of wood pilings for residential construction. However, Opert is working to gain acceptance for alternative foundation piling materials such as precast concrete or auger cast pilings, which are the norm in heavy construction.

Since it won't burn, the PBS home costs about half as much to insure than a stick-built structure and long-term maintenance is significantly more affordable.

"It's very quick to build," Opert said. "It only takes a day and a half or two days to erect the panels, and we can deliver the whole house within six to eight weeks."

Even other concrete homes being built — poured in place, or concrete masonry units finished with stucco require a lot of labor to construct, Opert said.

"We just need one welder, three helpers and a crane, and we've got the walls built."

Specially designed casting forms make the finished product look like wood. •

— Angelle Bergeron



Precast Building Solutions' Brian Opert started building homes made from premade concrete panels after seeing the destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina's winds.

PHOTO BY FRANK AYWAMI

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PHOTO BY TRACIE MORRIS SCHAEFER

SouthCoast Solar employees, from left, Tim Coats, Micah Galy and Issac Wright, install a solar panel on a customer's roof.

SouthCoast Solar

Key innovation: selling and installing solar panels on residential homes and businesses

Biggest clients: homeowners

Where they're based: New Orleans

Top executive: Troy Von Otnott, founder and president

Year introduced: 2008

OFTEN TOUTED AS an energy alternative but usually cost-prohibitive, solar power is on the way to becoming a viable option for Louisiana homeowners.

The Louisiana Solar Energy Tax Credit program is making it more affordable for Louisiana residents with a program that offers a 50 percent rebate, up to \$25,000 per system. The state allows residents to buy as many systems as they need to cover 100 percent of their electricity. Add in an additional 30 percent tax credit from the federal gov-

ernment, and homeowners and businesses have to pick up only about a quarter of their solar installation costs.

That is what founder and president Troy Von Otnott was counting on when he started SouthCoast Solar, a New Orleans-based company specializing in the design and construction of high-performance solar power systems.

"On a standard \$25,000 installation, the state will give you a \$12,500 tax incentive. If you wanted to put \$100,000 of solar power on your residence, the state is going to rebate you \$50,000. Unlike other solar plans that have a cap, Louisiana's does not," Von Otnott said.

Chris Kornman is vice president of Southern Homes, a homebuilder with communities in Louisiana and Alabama. He called on SouthCoast to install solar-powered water and electricity in Southern's model home in the Del Sol subdivision in Covington and is receiving interest from prospective homebuyers. Kornman said that with tax incentives and

more public education, solar powered homes will become more common in the coming years.

"We hope (Del Sol) will be a neighborhood with a lot of solar power and water in it. Our intention is to sell it as an option to buyers, and I think solar water and power will eventually become a secondary part of typical building," Kornman said.

Von Otnott had worked in real estate development for the past decade before teaming up with partners Tucker Crawford, CEO, and Scott Oman, chief technical officer and solar designer, to form SouthCoast Solar. Von Otnott expects solar power to be as efficient and affordable as fossil fuel-generated power by 2012.

"Solar power becomes more affordable every year and is the most widely distributable energy source on the planet. I think solar power will take a quantum leap in the next five years."•

— Craig Guillot

Virtual home staging

The Occasional Wife

Key innovation: staging a home on the market using oversized photos of furnishings

Biggest client: real estate agents

Where they're based: New Orleans

Top executive: Kay Morrison, founder

Year introduced: 2008

SINCE STARTING The Occasional Wife in 2007 to provide an extra set of hands with things such as event planning, personal shopping and day-to-day chores, Kay Morrison and Mary Gaudin have expanded their repertoire to help sell homes.

"The market is so competitive, and so many houses on

the market are empty," Morrison said. "It makes the house a lot harder to sell. It's hard to picture yourself there."

But it can cost hundreds or thousands of dollars a month to rent furniture for a house that might ultimately need to be moved out.

So the pair came up with a labor-free, cost-effective way to create the same effect with just a camera and a computer — they take pictures of furniture, draperies and accessories and digitally place these images into photos of inside the homes using Adobe Photoshop. They then take these photos, enlarge them to poster size and place them in the empty homes for potential buyers to see. The result is a godsend to Realtors, they say.

"What these ladies have come up with I must say is the most innovative marketing item I have seen in the real estate investment market in the last 10 years," said Andy

Severino of Highland Construction and Real Estate Investors. "They have created a cost-efficient and effective form of home staging in a very competitive and downturned real estate market."

The two plan to market the patent-pending program to furniture stores and real estate agencies. Hoping for it to catch on nationwide, they will unveil the product at the National Realtors Convention in Orlando, Fla., in November. They will also open their first franchise store in Dallas this fall and a store on Canal Street by the end of the year.

"We always knew we'd be doing a wide variety of things. We say everyone needs an occasional wife ... and that could really encompass everything and anything," Morrison said. "The most fun and interesting thing is that we never know what our days are going to be like." •

— *Lauren LaBorde*



Mary Gaudin, left, and Kay Morrison of The Occasional Wife show a home for sale using their virtual home staging system.

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