

## MEET A MEMBER

### A Market Yearning for Innovation: *Researcher Turned Entrepreneur Revolutionizes the Lab*

When thousands of dollars are invested in animal colonies for research, teaching and testing, a pathogen outbreak is the last thing a researcher needs. Quality research and animal care must not be compromised – particularly when it comes to basic practices of disinfecting cages, laboratory supplies and equipment.

Preston Van Hooser, 38, a long time University of Washington researcher, has spent countless hours handling mice and other animals in the lab. He recognized that the industry-standard process of disinfecting mouse cages using a hand-held spray bottle was time-consuming, and caused hand fatigue from the repetitive motion. Juggling the cage with one slippery, gloved hand while spraying it down with the other – being careful not to drop the cage – seemed an outdated process in today's high-tech world. He thought: There must be a better, faster, safer way to handle animal cages and equipment.

One day, inspiration struck. Van Hooser envisioned an automated, hands-free system for disinfecting mouse cages. With a rare combination of research-minded determination, entrepreneurship and business savvy, Van Hooser embraced the challenge of turning his vision into a marketable product. The result: The SPF (Specific Pathogen Free) Misting Station, which eliminates the difficulties associated with the traditional spray bottle and provides full-coverage cage disinfection in less than a second – automatically.



“Mice are an increasingly important part of research today. The challenge is keeping them healthy and free from disease,” explains Van Hooser. Pathogen outbreaks can cause clinical and sub-clinical infections, which may compromise research data or result in costly clinical care and the potential loss of valuable rodent colonies. Research may be stopped for weeks or months, putting the researcher’s career on the line and research funds in jeopardy.

Van Hooser has a deep understanding of the challenges and risks of working with lab animals, particularly in an SPF environment. He adds, “The SPF Misting Station is a step forward in streamlining and accelerating the standard disinfection and animal handling techniques currently used, but there’s a huge opportunity to revolutionize many other procedures in the research lab. It’s a market yearning for innovation.”

To kick-start his business venture, Van Hooser applied for and received a grant in January 2006 from UW TechTransfer to develop his SPF Misting Station. Later that same year, he founded Cirrus BioSystems. Well on his way to turning his invention into a viable, patent-pending product and building a foundation for future product development, he met Stuart Jamieson, President of Slipstream Design. The Seattle-based business incubator specializes in helping young companies transform ideas into marketable products. Together, Slipstream Design and Cirrus BioSystems were a match made in entrepreneurial heaven.

Jamieson explains, “I was scouting for innovative product ideas when I met Preston.” “He introduced the Misting Station and presented his larger vision for revolutionizing the research lab environment. That’s when I knew this would be a good fit for Slipstream Design.”

Jamieson has a knack for successful business ventures. He was part of the team that won the 2004 University of Washington Business Plan competition for an aquarium monitoring test strip technology. This was the catalyst for launching his first company, AquaStasis. To get it off the ground, he too partnered with Slipstream Design to develop and market the company’s award-winning product. Ultimately, through that partnership Jamieson directed the profitable sale of the AquaStasis technology to Virbac Corporation. Following that success, he came on board as president of Slipstream Design, and repositioned the company into a one-stop shop for incubating new companies and products.

Now Slipstream Design helps to build the infrastructure of a company to support a successful product launch and future growth. This process encompasses all aspects of the business – from initial concept to product development and production, as well as business planning, staffing, financing and marketing.

“Slipstream Design is different from traditional incubators in that we’re there at the very beginning business planning stages, all the way through to go-to-market,” explains Jamieson. “This full-service approach allows us to increase the efficiencies and lower the risks associated with starting a company.”

Jamieson adds that the early-stage focus and deep involvement was the stimulant behind securing high investor returns for AquaStasis, and they hope to repeat and build on that success with Cirrus BioSystems and other ventures.

Today, Jamieson continues to lead Slipstream Design, and also acts as CEO of Cirrus BioSystems. Van Hooser also holds two roles: Senior Compliance Analyst for the University of Washington, and President and CSO of Cirrus BioSystems.

“Because Preston has one foot in the world of business and one foot in the world of science, he brings a highly competitive, dual perspective to the company,” Jamieson said. “His in-the-trenches experience gives him a direct understanding of the issues, which guides the company’s vision for creating product innovations the market really needs.” This advantage ensures that Slipstream Design and Cirrus BioSystems are bringing products to a ready market rather than inventing interesting products and then searching for a market.

In a similar way Jamieson’s twin roles enable him to be personally involved from many perspectives. Through Slipstream Design he continues to seek out new products, and tap into investors that share visions similar to that of Cirrus BioSystems for revolutionizing today’s modern research lab. And day-to-day Jamieson uses his strong business expertise and related experiences to guide Cirrus BioSystems and other business ventures through the quick turns and hidden surprises common to the start-up phase of most companies.

While the SPF Misting Station is new to the market, it is already generating interest in animal research laboratories and animal facilities that recognize the need to incorporate state-of-the-art equipment and practices into daily routines. Van Hooser, however, keeps his eyes on the horizon: “While the launch of the Misting Station is exciting, we continue to drive toward our larger vision: To develop solutions for the modern research lab that improve efficiency, increase ease-of-use and automation, and protect the health and well-being of lab animals while ensuring compliance. It’s all about the research – making the process easier, faster, safer and more cost effective.”