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TOLEDO BUSINESS LINK

ENERGY

Xunlight burns bright for UT licensing, tech transfer program

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Professor Xunming Deng and Xunlight Corp. have served as role models of how licensing and technology transfer at UT is supposed to work, university officials said.

Deng, a professor of physics at UT, and the 45 employees at Xunlight are working to make some of the most advanced solar panels produced in the country. The technology for the solar panels evolved from research Deng conducted, licensed and patented through the UT Tech Transfer Office.

“Dr. Deng has gotten a tremendous amount of third-party validation, and his success is invaluable as we hold him up to other UT researchers to highlight the type of spin-off companies they can create,” said Daniel Kory, associate vice president for technology transfer at UT.

Kory, Deng and Liwei Xu from Xunlight recently met in UT President Dr. Lloyd Jacobs' office to sign a transfer of equity agreement, giving UT a stronger financial stake in the future of Deng's booming business at Xunlight's new manufacturing facility in Toledo.

“The strong partnership with UT is very critical for Xunlight's commercialization process. The transfer of the company's equity to UT strengthens the ties of both entities,” Deng said. “For UT, the ownership of equity could lead to a significant financial return when Xunlight goes with an initial public offering [of stock].”

Xunlight reflects the best of UT's regional economic development efforts, Kory said. It is a subsidiary of Midwest OptoElectronics Inc., which Deng began in the UT incubator facility.

“Not only is Xunlight a company that helps solidify a photovoltaic cluster in Northwest Ohio, it is also employing highly educated employees, many engineers and physicists from UT in a high-tech industry we're trying to grow in this region,” Kory said.

As researchers try to get their businesses started, Kory said, UT has established incubation facilities and policies to help foster that initial growth. Once various levels of financial success are achieved, the university assumes more equity in the company.

Xunlight is developing its manufacturing facility in Toledo with hopes to begin full production of the thin-cell solar panels late this year or early in 2009, Deng said.

“We are realizing our goals with Xunlight after many years of research and hard work,” said Xu, Deng's wife who also serves as the company's vice president of administration and finance.

TECHNOLOGY

Two studies rank UT among nation's best

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Two independent sources have ranked UT nationally among the top 10 universities in licensing technology and launching start-up companies.

One study ranked UT third in the country among universities for startup companies formed per $1 million of funding. Among universities executing licenses, UT ranked sixth; it ranked seventh in launching startup companies when taking research expenditures into account, according to another study.

The rankings were announced in San Diego at the recent annual meeting of the Association of University Technology Managers (AUTM).

“I knew we were productive, but I didn't realize we were in the top 10. It felt good to be recognized among our peers from around the world,” said Daniel Kory, associate vice president for technology transfer at UT.

The rankings were determined by separate research presented at the AUTM convention.

Brigham Young University (BYU) revealed the No. 3 ranking for startup companies in a presentation. The schools that ranked ahead of UT were BYU and the University of North Carolina.

The No. 6 and No. 7 rankings were determined in calculations by Innovation Associates, an economic development consulting firm based in Reston, Va.

“I am very pleased with the two reports that show UT is a national leader in technology transfer and commercialization,” said Frank Calzonetti, vice president for research development at UT. “This underscores the fact that we are doing an effective job of pulling technology out of the institution and implementing our goal to create an exemplary tech-transfer pathway.”

The report by Innovation Associates showed universities with more modest research budgets and those located in more economically challenged areas are becoming increasingly successful in technology transfer and commercialization.

Academic institutions such as BYU, UT, Iowa State and the University of Akron are more productive in executing licenses and launching startups than some better-known research institutions like Stanford, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the University of Michigan, said Innovation Associates President Diane Palmintera.

Rankings in both presentations were calculated before UT's merger with the Medical University of Ohio in 2006, Kory said.

“With the merger and recent additions of some new employees, we are poised for continued, accelerated growth in technology transfer at UT,” he said.

Kory heads a small staff in UT's Office of Technology Transfer and Commercialization, which added two new members in 2007.

Mark Fox, who serves as a technology associate, is becoming familiar with UT's entire research enterprise and is working directly with faculty members to identify new inventions and create new invention disclosures.

Samuel Giles, who works as a licensing associate, works with inventors and researchers at UT to license new technologies and patent new inventions.

Stephen Snider serves as director of licensing and contracts.

Sandy Rhoades, the intellectual property administrator, manages the prosecution activities and maintains a history of the more than 300 issued and pending patents at UT. She also manages the accounting for receivables and payables with its law firms, licensees and UT inventors.

The university has launched numerous startup companies including First Solar, a manufacturer of solar panels in Perrysburg, and Xunlight Corp., a thin-film solar cell manufacturer in Toledo.

Earlier this year, ADS Biotechnology Corp. signed a licensing agreement with UT to develop and market a pharmaceutical product invented by a group of UT researchers.

One of the latest start-ups to emerge from UT is SuGanit Systems founded by Praveen Paripati, who, along with three faculty members from the UT colleges of engineering and arts and sciences, is commercializing research and technology for the latest generation of ethanol.

Paripati worked with UT Tech Transfer on the licensing of the research and technology for the business that will operate out of the UT Incubator facility on the university's main campus.

Paripati said he chose to locate the business there because ongoing research is being conducted at UT. He is also working with the Regional Growth Partnership to establish the business, which will seek funding in the near future.

On the web go to utoledo.edu/research/TechTransfer.