

Exercise equipment may be firm's turning point

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A new virtual company, Turning Point, is collaborating to develop, produce and commercialize electronic equipment for the exercise and physical therapy industries.

Alan Schultheis, a novice entrepreneur from Connecticut, was looking for expertise in technology and manufacturing to bring his idea for a new exercise device to market. He was surprised to find everything he needed in the Toledo area.

"It literally started with a phone call to an engineering professor at the university. Dr. [Vijay] Goel is responsible for getting the whole thing started here," said Schultheis, founder of Turning Point.

Schultheis connected with Goel, who was chairman of the bioengineering division of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers. Goel specializes in bio-mechanical devices for spinal disorders, so he was interested in the entrepreneur's concept.

"My goal was to bring the company to Toledo and it worked out that way," said Goel, endowed chairman of the Department of Orthopaedic Bioengineering at UT.

Goel is leading the research and development of the device called the "Core Trainer." It focuses on the core parts of the body, including the upper legs, upper and lower abdominals, gluteus and mid-to-lower back, which are critical to back health, posture, movement and sports performance.

UT provided the brainpower for the project as Goel assembled a team that included Danny Pincivero, an associate professor in kinesiology; David Dick, a bio-engineer in Goel's department; and John Jeagly, a lab supervisor in mechanical engineering.

Schultheis and Goel worked with Daniel Kory, associate vice president for technology transfer at UT, on commercializing the technology

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■ DAVID DICK OF UT'S BIO-ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT DEMONSTRATES THE CORE TRAINER TO (FROM LEFT), JOHN KLOTZ OF RGP, ALAN SCHULTHEIS OF TURNING POINT, RICK WASSERMAN OF PINNACLE TECHNOLOGY, THOMAS UHLER OF TTL ASSOCIATES AND DON VOLLMAR OF LOCKREY MANUFACTURING.

developed in collaboration with the UT professors. They suggested that he talk to the Regional Growth Partnership (RGP).

"I couldn't have done it without RGP, its assistance in creating the virtual company and knowledge of other companies we needed for the project," Schultheis said.

RGP helped Schultheis and his academic partners identify the appropriate standards for testing the product established by the Food and Drug Administration and Underwriting Laboratories. Turning Point is continuing the innovation, manufacturing and technology required to meet those standards.

"Working with RGP, I was in a position to interpret and judge the resources available right here in Toledo," Schultheis said.

Turning Point is working with three local companies on various aspects of the project. The Core Trainer will be developed, tested

and manufactured in Toledo creating jobs with those companies.

Pinnacle Technology is developing the hardware and software for the touch-screen computer controls for the device. TTL Associates is testing the device to ensure that it meets industry standards, and Lockrey Manufacturing is working with the other sources to produce the piece of equipment in its Toledo facility. Schultheis said they plan to have the product ready for delivery by the end of this year.

Goel said they recruited Matt Franchetti, an assistant professor in industrial engineering at UT, to manage the project and its timeline with everyone involved.

A prototype of the Core Trainer is being tested in the athletic training facilities at UT's Savage Arena in collaboration with the Central Park West Rehabilitation Center.

The Core Trainer will include an innovative mix of information and technology with total control by the

athletic trainer or physical therapist that is not found in the industry today, Schultheis said.

"The device uses hydraulics to exercise muscles needed for different activities and is applicable to baseball, golf, tennis, many other sports and physical therapy for rehabilitation," Goel said.

"We use computers to control the resistance required for the desired exercise, preserve the data for comparison and provide bio-feedback to improve performance."

Turning Point received a \$50,000 Ignite grant from Rocket Ventures at RGP for the development of the touch-screen electronics for the Core Trainer.

"I didn't want to start a big company with a lot of employees so it takes an organization like RGP and its people with support from the business community to make it work today," Schultheis said. "RGP's proactive approach is what made the difference."