

SMALL BUSINESS

Firm gets out in front on energy conservation

Wireless plug anticipates smart grid to monitor and control use of electricity

By THOMAS ADAMS

The owners of Tenrehte Technologies Inc. have altered their business plan during the company's brief existence, switching from building semiconductor computer chips to building a wireless plug that measures and reduces energy consumption.

Tenrehte was co-founded in March 2009 by Jennifer Indovina, her father, Mark Indovina, and Russell Priebe. Jennifer, 27, is president and CEO. Mark, 51, is chief operating officer; Priebe is chief technology officer.

The business operates out of Mark Indovina's home in Irondequoit.

Tenrehte's Picowatt smart-grid wireless plug was the winner in the green technology category at the annual Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas last January.

Three months later, Tenrehte won the Rochester Regional Business Plan Contest on April 30. It received a first prize of \$25,000, incubation services worth \$5,000 from High Tech Rochester Inc., and \$2,500 in marketing services from Dixon Schwabl Advertising Inc.

The company has received some 300 orders for the Picowatt product, Jennifer says.

"Energy is a very exciting market right now, particularly energy efficiency," she says. "There's a need that's not yet being fulfilled by utility companies or appliance manufacturers."

"People are becoming much more energy-conscious. There's a need for them to have access to real-time information about their energy use, as well as the ability to control their appliances online."

The company, which has five employees, is reinvesting the money it makes, Mark says.

Tenrehte is partnering with Harbec Plas-

tics Inc. of Wayne County to make the Picowatt device.

"Harbec Plastics is a company that's very energy efficient," Mark says. "They really liked the product. But finding vendors who would sell us parts at reasonable costs was difficult."

Tenrehte hopes to have vendors lined up this week.

"In terms of startup companies, it's very important to make money," Jennifer says. "Making cash is what makes a company valuable in the long term, so they can continue to grow and develop new technology."

"But in the beginning, relationships are a key instrument to a company's success. For us, partnering with companies and enabling them to license Picowatt and integrate it into their power portfolios has been instrumental to our success."

The first discussions about their company occurred in the fall of 2008, Mark says. The first draft of a business plan came in January 2009.

Tenrehte, with its plan for a computer chip, was a finalist in the 2009 Rochester Business Plan Contest but did not win. It researched and developed prototypes to show potential investors. During that process, Jennifer discovered the Consumer Electronics Show.

The company entered the i-Stage competition for any new or original products physically formed.

"The product could be anywhere from a prototype, which is what we took there, to something that's five minutes away from being commercially available," Mark says.

The Picowatt did not win the i-Stage competition but did win in the first-ever green technology category.

"We didn't even know there was a category for this," Mark says.

This is the third business endeavor for the Indovinas. They ran a \$64 million division of Cadence Design Systems Inc., a California-based electronic design automation firm, before being let go, Mark says. After that they launched Improv Systems Inc., an intellectual property for digital signal processing, which they transitioned into Tenrehte.

"We have been self-funding the company,"



Photo courtesy of Tenrehte Technologies

CEO Jennifer Indovina says other nations lead the U.S. in developing a smart electrical grid and implementing variable pricing for residential customers.

Mark says. "We're not wealthy, but we're willing to put skin in the game. We've got that money. We're in the stage of friends and family, and we're looking for angel investments."

He hopes Picowatt will be available in retail outlets by the end of 2011.

There is some interest in the U.S. but more in international markets such as the United Kingdom, Italy, France, South Africa and Latin America, Jennifer says.

"Many of these countries are much farther along than the United States is in terms of smart-grid deployment," she says. "They have variable pricing for residential consumers, which gives a huge incentive to see where they're spending the most and then cut back on that."

"That sort of deployment is just around the corner in the U.S. We're maybe two to three years away from it. I think demand is going to ramp up in the U.S."

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