

## James Senall: Rochester still knows how to innovate

In a recent broadcast, ABC Nightly News turned its focus on one of its fellow network shows, *Shark Tank*, and how the “sharks” rejected investing in a high-potential American-invented product — [Invis-A-Rack](#), a quick-install rack system for pick-up trucks — solely on the grounds that the inventor/entrepreneur refused to have it manufactured overseas.

Donnie McCall, from Sparta, N.C., the U.S. Navy veteran who came up with the idea, insisted that any manufacturing be done in the United States, his small but symbolic way of trying to help the economy. He walked away from *Shark Tank* unfunded but undaunted.

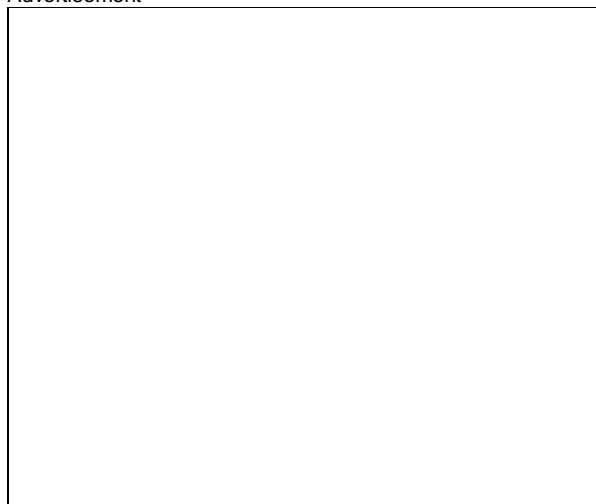
Our own [Rochester Regional Business Plan Contest](#) (not unlike *Shark Tank*, though without drama and glitz) has seen dozens upon dozens of entries from area companies. This year’s winner — [Strong Arm Technologies](#), which received \$25,000 cash, and business services from [High Tech Rochester](#) and others — anticipates manufacturing right here in Rochester. Their product, a wearable device that minimizes the frequency of lower back injuries in the workplace, has global potential.

Last year’s winner, [Exiscan](#), designs and produces infrared inspection windows for high-power electrical cabinets. 2010 winner [Tenrehte Technologies](#) designed and developed a wireless ‘smart plug’ to help save electrical energy. In fact, the past five years’ winners are all companies that will manufacture products. In the hip and trendy world of iPhone apps and social media, the Rochester region is showing it still knows how to develop and make real, tangible products.

Using *Shark Tank* as a benchmark, two Rochester-area start-ups have been on the program. [ViewSport Inc.](#), a Rochester-based clothing company that makes sweat-activated fitness apparel, appeared on April 13. [Boot Illusions](#), a Rochester-based company that sells an innovative shoe accessory, appeared on May 4.

While ViewSport did not “wow” the sharks, Boot Illusions did and went home with an investment of \$100,000. And we hear that other Rochester companies have been

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considered by the show's producers. Innovation, however, is not limited to startups.

Existing companies are continuously innovating, such as Medina's Trek, Inc., which worked with us on a manufacturing process to dramatically improve their operations and productivity, and then on new product development to bring new innovative products to market. Our "sold out" May workshop on Innovation Engineering tells us that Rochester-area manufacturers value this type of mentoring and assistance.

Author Thomas Friedman, in *The World is Flat*, pointed out that manufacturing migrates globally to the places where goods can be produced cheaply. We don't doubt the accuracy of Friedman's reporting, but it's time for a new tilt: The United States has added more than 200,000 manufacturing jobs in the past year. Based on the key tenets of innovation and know-how, Rochester should be ahead of the curve.

As for inventor McCall and Invis-A-Rack, the backlash against the sharks was quick. He received calls from American manufacturers interested in partnering with him to produce it.

Maybe entrepreneur McCall should move to Rochester — we know we can help.

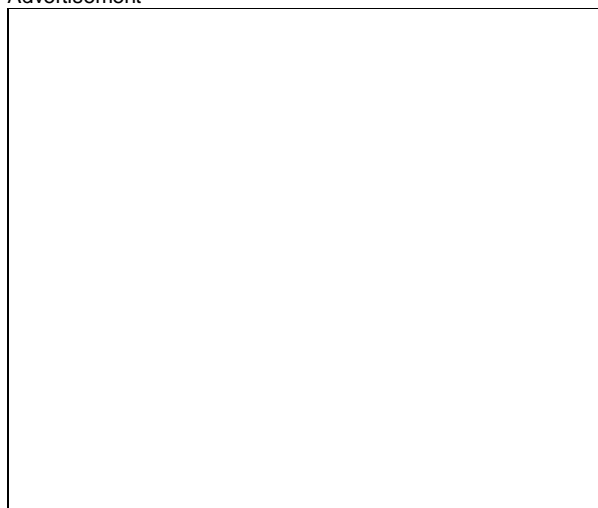
### This week's Nextpert

James Senall is president of High Tech Rochester Inc., a non-profit that incubates high-tech startup companies and provides innovation and growth services to established small- and medium-sized manufacturing firms. Interested in being a Nextpert? Email [RocNext@DemocratandChronicle.com](mailto:RocNext@DemocratandChronicle.com) .

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