

# Star-Telegram

Award is step in the right direction for inventors of leg-rehab device

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While recovering from knee surgery a few years ago, Johnny Ross of Mansfield came up with an idea that sent him on an entrepreneurial quest.

He quit his 15-year career negotiating contracts for medical giant Johnson & Johnson to develop StepRite, a wearable device designed to help patients with their physical therapy for leg injuries or surgery, and to help doctors do a better job with their patients.

His company, MedHab, recently received a huge boost by being named one of the most promising companies at the Rice Alliance for Technology and Entrepreneurship's ninth annual Life Science Venture Forum at Rice University in Houston.

The honor has hooked him up with potential investors. MedHab is looking to raise \$2 million to take the device to clinical trials and production, Ross said.

"I firmly believe this product will make patients better faster," Ross said. "There's a huge need for it."

Rehab sprouts an idea

Ten weeks after an orthopedic surgeon rebuilt Ross' right knee, he started physical therapy. At the beginning, he was given strict guidelines about how much weight he could put on his leg. Ross said that he did fine judging the pressure when he was with the physical therapist but that when he left the office, it was hard to know.

"It just hit me one day," Ross said. "I designed a device that would make objective measurements."

Ross took his idea to a friend, Tim Sanghera, an engineer and computer scientist who built a model in about 30 days. Sanghera joined Ross, and the two founded MedHab in 2008. Ross is CEO, and Sanghera is chief technical officer.

The device measures a person's pressure, gait and flexibility, and also does thermal sensing, which can determine whether an infection is setting in. Patients would learn whether they are putting too much or too little weight on their leg and whether they're exercising as the doctor ordered.

StepRite would record that data, which could be retrieved by the doctor, who would know exactly what rehab the patient did, when it was done and whether it was done right. Making adjustments in treatment would speed recovery and reduce costs, Ross said.

The device has been submitted to the U.S. Patent Office.

Good 'elevator pitch'

About 400 investors, venture capitalists, medical industry representatives and others attended this year's forum. MedHab was one of nine companies selected as "most promising" from a group of 40 invited to give a 90-second "elevator pitch," simulating the time an entrepreneur might have with a potential investor in a chance meeting.

Tech Fort Worth, a nonprofit business incubator that MedHab joined in April, encouraged Ross to apply to the forum. It also helped with his pitch, giving Ross the idea to use crutches to get onstage to draw attention.

"It worked out beautifully," Ross said. "Because of this, we have some investors that spoke with us at our booth after the presentation. We were at that time able to demonstrate on the computer some of the things our product would do."

Darlene Ryan, executive director of Tech Fort Worth, said the forum is a way for new companies to get their name into the marketplace and for someone to take notice. Tech Fort Worth has helped Sanghera and Ross polish the way they talk about their product and company, she said.

"They're very smart people, very experienced people, but they never started a company before," Ryan said. New entrepreneurs, she said, "usually don't understand how investors think. To win this award is really ideal."

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