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## Vanderbilt Aims to Bank on New Ideas

April Wortham

Vanderbilt University's technology transfer program has signed its first local startup in more than two years, signaling the program's renewed focus on drug, medical device and life science discoveries.

Local serial entrepreneur Shawn Gliner of NanoFerix signed an agreement with the Center for Technology Transfer and Commercialization to research a tech application that he hopes to market to established pharmaceutical companies.

Tech transfer programs are used as barometers to measure a university's success rate in moving key discoveries and innovations to the market.

"If we don't transfer technology developments within our institution into the hands of industry partners, then the general public cannot receive the benefits from their tax support of basic research," said Alan Bentley, Vanderbilt's assistant vice chancellor of technology transfer and intellectual property protection.

Gliner's new startup, NanoFerix, launched this year after a meeting with Bentley. Previously, Gliner was president and CEO of an early-stage biotech company called Special Water Global.

In his first full year on the job, Bentley, who previously was the director of commercialization for clinic innovations at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation, has added staff and upgraded its processes for evaluation and commercialization of Vanderbilt's intellectual property. The tech transfer center has expanded to nine from four licensing workers and increased total staff to 22, up from 14 when Bentley arrived. In addition, a new medical director, Ken Holroyd, was named about six months ago.

Vanderbilt issued 31 new patents and submitted 276 new invention disclosures in 2011, compared to an average of 22 patents issued and 145 new invention disclosures over a five-year period from 2007 to 2011.

But commercialization revenue is down from a five-year high of \$11 million in 2009 to roughly \$9.2 million in 2011. Revenue has averaged \$8.4 million over the past five years.

### **Vanderbilt lags far behind industry leaders.**

According to figures compiled by the Association of University Technology Managers, license income earned in 2010 by Northwestern University was nearly \$180 million, and for New York University it was more than \$178 million.

Bentley's old employer, Cleveland Clinic, earned \$35 million in license income in 2010, AUTM reported.

"Revitalizing an operation like this takes some time, but we have built out the office and added some expertise," Bentley said.

While Vanderbilt searches for opportunities nationally and often with larger corporations, Bentley said the university has a desire to look for more Middle Tennessee opportunities.

"We want to engage the local expertise and local talent here," Bentley said. "We're trying to make the best decisions for the technologies."

Glinter saw an opportunity to harness a promising new technology and decided to reach out to Vanderbilt, Bentley said.

"I was really committed to doing a biotech startup here in Nashville," Glinter said.

He's hoping to raise \$5 million over the next few years and get NanoFerix through a first phase of clinical trials for the application, which is designed to research drugs approved for market and find new uses for them through the use of nanotechnology.

Nanotechnology involves the manipulation and study of matter at the atomic level.

"This is a totally new venture for me," Glinter said. "I've always been fascinated with nanotechnology and nanomedicine."

Bentley said the center is gathering and using data to track and improve turnaround times for moving technologies to the community and keep pace with the level inventors expect.

"It would suffice to say the institution wanted to see more commercial activity from its research efforts," Bentley said.

Bentley also is a board member of the Nashville Entrepreneur Center, where Gliner currently serves as a mentor.

“It’s a big win for Vanderbilt and our business community,” Michael Burcham, president and CEO of the entrepreneur center, said of the deal with Gliner. “Anytime we can create linkages, it gives our students opportunities for a job.”