

Winning prize a breathtaking feat

Tec Edmonton gives top award to Picomole's innovative medical analysis device

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Two years ago John Cormier took a deep breath and gave up his day job as a scientist with a local biotech firm.

Thursday he blew away the competition at the annual TEC Edmonton Venture Prize with his LifeSens clinical breath-analysis instrument.

It won him \$108,000 in cash and prizes, but more importantly, the competition shines a spotlight on his Picomole Instruments Inc. as it looks for a cash infusion to take the product to market, Cormier told TEC Edmonton's annual lunch at Shaw Conference Centre.

"It's a great validation of the long effort we've put into it, and now we'll be gunning for Health Canada approval."

It's taken 15 years to develop the technology behind LifeSens, which uses laser spectroscopy to minutely analyze people's breath.

Although its main use will be in medical diagnostics, Cormier said it can be used in a variety of fields, including law enforcement.

"It's fast, easy to use and non-invasive, and can measure the compounds in a person's breath to parts per trillion levels."

"It's so easy that clinicians can literally say 'just breathe.'"

It's also cost-effective, at a dollar or two per analysis, which makes it even more attractive, said Cormier, who figures it will take about three years to get Health Canada approval and "take it to the finish."

The lucrative U.S. market is the ultimate goal, but they won't do that until they are ready, he added.

They will focus on its uses for asthma initially because the disease is so difficult



GREG SOUTHAM, THE JOURNAL

Picomole Instrument founder and CEO John Cormier, right, and Denis Dufour vice-president of technology, accept the TEC Edmonton's annual Venture prize for fledgling businesses and startups.

to monitor, Cormier said.

"It's such a prevalent disease."

"They now say every child that's born has a 40-per-cent chance of getting the disease by the age of 40, and that's just stunning."

Cormier is particularly aware of the dangers as his wife Isabel gave birth to a daughter a week ago.

Runners-up in the competition, which culminated in three start-up compa-

nies giving their "elevator pitch" to a panel of judges Thursday, were Business Infusions of Balzac, which developed veterinary-practice software, and Nirix Technology of Edmonton, a provider of comprehensive IT services to small companies.

The new student entrepreneur competition was won by Justin Duban of the University of Lethbridge for his Refuel Biodiesel Corp., a vertically integrated

biodiesel facility.

TEC Edmonton, a joint venture between the U of A and Edmonton Economic Development Corp., helps innovators protect their technology and move it toward the commercialization stage.

It will move in October from the U of A to downtown Enterprise Square, the former Bay building.

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