

Radiating SUCCESS

By
Kevin Fritz

RICHARD SWEAT'S CENTRAL FLORIDA-BASED MEDICAL DEVICE COMPANY, .DECIMAL, HAS CHANGED COUNTLESS LIVES — INCLUDING HIS OWN.

On that day, armed with no more than an A.S. degree in Allied Health from Seminole Community College and an A.A. from Palm Beach Community College, the man who had been busy playing drums for a rock and roll band created a new company, an Internet-based manufacturer of custom, patient-specific devices for use in radiation therapy.

"I can remember playing at the Cheyenne Saloon on Church Street for dollar longneck night," recalls the CEO/president of .decimal (pronounced dot decimal) with a smile, admitting he virtually stumbled on to his career in radiation therapy.

The Lyman High School graduate had no pre-conceived notion of what he wanted to do with the rest of his life until a chance meeting with someone from Orlando Regional Medical Center, who offered him a job as a technical assistant in radiation oncology. He admits he was intrigued by this new venture, but he didn't expect to unleash a dormant passion that today brings worldwide accolades for his contributions to cancer research and treatment.

What started 24 years ago as a family-owned business with four employees called Southeastern Radiation Products, .decimal, which is an acronym for Digitally Enhanced Compensation/Intensity Modulation with Alloys, now employs 48 workers in a 35,000-square-foot facility in Sanford. Kudos include being named among *Inc.* magazine's list of the top 5,000 best companies for the past four years and receiving the inaugural Medical Marker award from *bioOrlando*, a program of the Metro Orlando Economic Development Commission. *Florida Trend* magazine also ranked .decimal



PHELAN EBENHACK

Richard Sweat

»» Much has changed since a 24-year-old Richard Sweat sat on the balcony of his third-floor Orlando apartment in 1986 and mapped out an idea that would not only change his life forever, but the lives of cancer patients throughout the world.

#11 on its list of best places to work and #1 in its list of companies that engage employees. That may have something to do with the indoor basketball court, employee kick-boxing classes, or the in-house studio where guitars, drums and amps await an impromptu jam.

For the past 20 years, .decimal has quietly provided its products to medical facilities worldwide. Locally, its customers include the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center and Florida Hospital.

A Florida native who was born in Jacksonville, Sweat says the real success of .decimal came the day he discovered how to provide custom compensators on demand.

"In 1999, my compensator idea changed my life again," he explains. "It was based on the concept of receiving the orders over the Internet and creating them for hospitals and cancer centers so they wouldn't have to go out and buy their own equipment.

"Our Internet-based program is key," he boasts. "Orders in by noon are out by 7:30 p.m." And as luck would have it, the Obama Administration's pay-as-you-go concept for entitlement spending, such as healthcare, is the exact business model Sweat has in place.

Today, .decimal employs its computer software to create custom compensators that are ordered, engineered, manufactured, and shipped daily in approximately five to six hours. The devices are created by a patented, proprietary CAD/CAM system generating Computerized Numerical Control programs used by the milling machines that precisely mill each compensator to the patient's tumor size and shape. The compensators, which work like filters for radiation therapy machines, are then used in proton, photon, and electron radiation therapies.

"As the radiation passes through .decimal's devices," Sweat explains, "it is shaped specifically for each individual patient, thereby sparing as much healthy tissue as possible while treating the tumor to the physician's prescribed dose. In essence, the thick part [of the compensator] stops the radiation, and the thin part lets it through."

He adds that his system essentially allows anyone requiring prototype development a quick turnaround on complex, high-value parts.

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"We can make anything people want," he notes. "The client simply uploads to our website, and we make it."

In fact, when radiation started getting a bad rap thanks to an article in the *New York Times* earlier this year, Sweat realized it was time to diversify his portfolio. He leased a warehouse across the street from .decimal and began making prototype parts for defense companies and the aerospace industry, including SpaceX, the California company contracted by NASA to bring supplies to the International

Space Station. In all, he already has a half-dozen customers for this new line of business.

The Longwood resident, husband to his eighth-grade sweetheart Karen and father of three, once again realizes that the sky is the limit; but exactly where he will end up is still unscripted.

"Some of the things that have happened to me, I could not have imagined," he says. "It all just happened so fast."

For more about .decimal, visit www.dotdecimal.com.