

Kansas Biomedical Company Advances Brain Disorder Research

Whether it is Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's, seizures or sleep disorders, studying the brain is a complex, and therefore time consuming, process. If researchers need to build their own research tools in addition to performing experiments, the race for critical discoveries slows even more.

The biomedical support company [Pinnacle Technology](#) fills that need by designing and manufacturing important research tools. "We try to develop turn-key research tools for people to study the brain," says Donna Johnson, who founded Pinnacle in Lawrence, Kansas in 1995. Many of the company's products are sensors that can detect brain chemistry changes in mice and rats to study [aging](#), [epilepsy](#) and [sleep disorders](#), to name a few.



And understanding the complex chemistry of the brain will put researchers one step closer to discovering treatments and cures for neurological disorders, which affect [hundreds of millions](#) of people worldwide.

Today Pinnacle manufactures more than 300 products, exports to 41 countries, and sells to hundreds of clients. "There's probably close to 500 publications from people using our research tools," says Johnson.

But before any of those publications were written, researchers questioned whether they wanted to risk trying a new product. Johnson says it took some years for Pinnacle to gain traction, even with the Small Business Innovative Research (SBIR) grants they started receiving in 1999. But the SBIR grants gave their work validation and allowed the company to research, test, and manufacture new brain research products year after year, like glucose and oxygen brain sensors and specialized cages to measure animal behavior and physiology.

"At the end of every SBIR, we try to put a tool on the marketplace," says Johnson.

Pinnacle has received SBIR grants to support product development projects from five NIH institutes, including the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, the National Institute of Aging and the National Institute of Mental Health. In 2019 Pinnacle won the 2019 Kansas [Governor's Exporter of the Year](#) award for their export activities.

Johnson says the SBIR grant program is important because "it allows small businesses the opportunity to get research dollars, which is very hard." For Pinnacle, SBIR funding has been critical. The result is that brain researchers at universities, health agencies, hospitals and drug companies now have sophisticated tools to help them make discoveries faster.



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