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Precision Craftsman

Gregg Scheller, BS ME '79, launches a startup that produces instruments for cataract surgery, among other things.

Story by Marcus Wilkins

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Gregg Scheller, founder and CEO of Katalyst Surgical, knows about starting from scratch. In fact, as his third startup, the St. Louis surgical instrument company is a business about starting from incisions.



Gregg Scheller, BS ME '79

In 1986, Scheller, BS ME '79, of Wildwood, Mo., invented his first ophthalmic tool; the fiber-optic disposable endoilluminator used to light the inside of the eye during retina surgery. The implement launched Advanced Surgical Products, which he sold to a group of investors in 1990. Next, he founded Synergetics Inc., which grew from a home garage operation to a \$175 million NASDAQ listing by 2008.

In August 2011, Scheller and Katalyst secured a \$500,000 startup loan from the Missouri Technology Corporation (MTC), a partner of the Missouri Department of Economic Development.

“Obviously, the state feels as though we’re a good bet,” says Scheller of his company that produces titanium instruments primarily for cataract surgery. “As an engineer, I realized that many instruments were being thrown away in the operating room because they were rusted, and titanium is corrosion proof.”

Scheller spent a brief period from 2008–10 at the MU College of Engineering as the director of entrepreneurship and industry partnerships. He credits the college for nurturing his problem-solving skills. Although he remembers slogging through some seemingly superfluous engineering classes as an undergrad, he stresses the value of those fundamental courses when he speaks to youngsters today — especially his two Tiger sons, Michael, BS ME ’11, and Steven, another engineer to be.

“Engineering school trains your brain to recognize a problem and go through a logical process to solve that problem,” Scheller says. “In my case, solving a problem translates into better patient care, creating jobs, employing people and me having a career that I love.”

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