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Friday, January 1, 2010

10 Startups to Watch in 2010

The companies you might want to do business with in the new year

Baltimore Business Journal

Tired of reading about the same companies? Looking for a promising venture to back or do business with? The *Baltimore Business Journal* searched the region for 10 young companies that could help your business grow, already are turning heads in their industry and have a hot product or service. Here are the 10 startup companies we think you should know about in the new year.

- [Bioactive Surgical Inc.](#)
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For more on the BBJ's Startups to Watch, [click here to listen to the podcast, which features principals from Soleil Solar and Mastix Medica. Ann Lansinger, the leader of the Emerging Technology Center in Baltimore, also joins this special episode of BBJCast to talk about what comprises a successful startup.](#)

Also, check out [video of Single Carrot Theatre.](#)

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Bioactive Surgical Inc.

Baltimore Business Journal - by [Heather Harlan Warnack](#) Staff

Rick Spedden's surgery to fix his ruptured Achilles tendon left him in some pain.

But it also left him with a business partner and a burgeoning company.

Spedden and Dr. Lew C. Schon, of Union Memorial Hospital, struck up a rapport leading up to the surgery, and during a post-op visit, realized they had a mutual interest in stem cell technologies.

They decided to continue the conversation and involve a past partner of Spedden's, Laura Pingel. What resulted was an emerging local company called Bioactive Surgical Inc., which is trying to develop stem cell sutures.

Two to three years away from market, the sutures will have to be tested through clinical trials before landing federal Food and Drug Administration approval. But what Spedden and his team expect to prove is that stem cell-enabled sutures promote faster healing.

Their initial target customers are — you guessed it — those involved in Achilles tendon reconstruction surgery. Eventually, the broader medical community — from hospitals to doctors — may be interested. At least that's the hope.

"We are a startup company and this is high-risk," said Spedden, the firm's CEO.

Not only does Bioactive Surgical have to complete clinical trials, but it also has to make sure its patent is approved. Spedden said it may be more than three years before the firm receives an answer on its patent application.

That explains why Bioactive Surgical is in its pre-revenue phase.

Fueled with a \$250,000 nanobiotechnology grant from the state, Spedden said his team continues to apply for other grants. He also continues to file patent applications for other technologies.

The only company officers are Spedden, CFO Pingel and Schon, the chairman. Together, they have kicked in \$300,000 for the venture.



Photo by Nicholas Griner, Staff

Rick Spedden, left, Dr. Lew Schon and Laura Pingel invested \$300,000 of their own money to create Bioactive Surgical Inc.

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Classroomparent.com

Baltimore Business Journal - by [Joanna Sullivan](#) Staff

Tom Hoen describes putting together Roland Park Elementary/Middle School's paper directory as "painful."

Worse than that, once it was done — months after school started — it was already out of date.

"It had lots of typos," said Hoen, a parent of two Roland Park Elementary students. "Not only is the process laborious, it's error-prone and inadequate."

Hoen's new online venture, Classroomparent.com, was born out of that frustration. The online directory allows the school to keep in touch with its parents by e-mail without inundating them with papers detailing the latest school concert, big test or snow day.

The infant Web company has won Roland Park Elementary School and Saint David's Day School as test schools for Hoen's online directory service that connects parents to the school and to each other. For example, if the PTA needs parents to bake some cupcakes, a message gets sent out in search of the bakers. Parents can even use the directory to make a playdate.

Hoen, who already runs his own health-care consulting business, so far only counts revenue of about \$1,000. But he expects to have at least 10 schools enrolled for the directory service by the end of 2010. A directory subscription costs an annual \$2 per student. At a school like Roland Park, with 1,500 students, that's \$3,000.

It might only be a side job to his current business, but he doesn't expect that always to be the case.

"I believe very strongly that I will be very actively selling and marketing and building Classroomparent.com by the end of 2010, with a lot of schools under my belt," the 46-year-old former Alex. Brown & Sons executive said. He has contacted 30 schools, mostly private schools and pre-schools, about the service.

Hoen merely points out the regular handouts he often receives in both kids' backpacks as proof there is a demand for the service.

"Not only is that a paper cost, but a time cost for the teachers," he said.

Christine Fischel, the volunteer coordinator for the Roland Park Elementary/Middle School PTA, doesn't need to be convinced.

She said the school used to have a listserv where many different messages reached only people who signed up for it or signed on to a Yahoo group. For the online directory, parent and student information was pulled into a database. It can be changed whenever the information is updated and doesn't have to be submitted each year. To be successful, Hoen acknowledges that a school's parents must have access to the Internet. At Roland Park, that wasn't an issue; a large percentage of the school population was online.

"I know when I send an e-mail, it's hitting almost every parent who has signed up," Fischel said. "I can send it to one grade or one classroom — or directly to individuals."

Fischel used the e-mail feature to find parents with a science background to help out with the middle school's science fair. "Within 48 hours, I had 20 people signed up for this science event," she said.

Hoen plans to bootstrap the company as much as possible.

"The revenue really comes from acquiring a mass of people," Hoen said. "You have very little at the beginning and then you grow."

Don Rainey, general partner of venture capital firm Grotech Capital, agrees that it takes little funding to start an Internet business these days. But creating a viable venture is another story.

"It's worth noting that hope springs eternal," he said.

Rainey said the biggest challenge is that many people are accustomed to getting a "great deal of functionality for free" on the Internet. Free or cheap iPhone apps are only making them more spoiled.

But Rainey, who is not familiar with Classroomparent.com, agrees with Hoen's assessment that volume is key.

"You can create an overnight success with the Internet," Rainey said. "It's a game of large numbers."



Photo by Nicholas Griner, Staff

Tom Hoen wants to change the way schools communicate with parents.

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Cogmap

Baltimore Business Journal - by [Scott Dance](#) Staff

The entrepreneurs behind startup Cogmap are realistic about what their company is, and what it isn't. They also aren't shy about where they hope it goes.

"If LinkedIn is reading this and they want to buy us, then they should give us a call," said Alex Markson, who, along with Brent **Halliburton**, is developing the company, if you could call it that. Cogmap's Web site is a place where business people can view, edit and share organizational flow charts.

They say it's more of a "feature" or a "widget" for a company to acquire. But however you slice it, it's gaining steam in the business world as a way to figure out who to tap with a sales pitch, or how to most efficiently divide responsibilities across a company.

A glance at Cogmap's homepage shows that users are frequently using it to look at charts laying out the personnel behind **Google**, Apple, **H&R Block** and **Coca-Cola**.

The site launched two years ago and has grown to reach about 1,000 users per day, Halliburton said. He partnered with Markson's firm, Baltimore-based Web design and marketing company **No Inc.**, to launch Cogmap at virtually no cost other than Markson's time developing the site.

The idea came from Halliburton. While at **Advertising.com** and then AOL, he was confronted with the problem of getting bad information when trying to generate sales leads. He would pay for mailing lists showing a company's staff, but would end up with bad data, he said.

Halliburton didn't have the expertise to build the site himself, so he went to No Inc. and Markson.

At No Inc., the company carves out a chunk of its time just for innovation and development of startup ideas like Google, Markson said. So outside of projects building Web sites and Web-based software applications for No Inc. clients, Markson worked on developing Cogmap. No Inc. is No. 13 on the **Baltimore Business Journal's** List of Web design firms with 22 employees and \$1.7 million in revenue in 2008.

Now that the site is established, Cogmap is gearing up to actually make some money. It has started building special versions of its Web site for companies that want to use it to coordinate internally, such as the **Mozilla Foundation**, which created the Firefox Web browser.

It's also looking strongly at being acquired by a larger firm like business-oriented social network LinkedIn. Cogmap has also received interest from Forbes, which launched its own version of a site like Cogmap.

Other options Cogmap is considering to grow revenue include charging for extra content or subscriptions, Markson said.

Scott Ferber, for whom Halliburton worked at Advertising.com, said he has high expectations for what the two entrepreneurs could do.

"Brent's a great product and strategy guy," Ferber said. "And Alex is great at [information technology], digital technology and telecom."

Cogmap is not the last or only venture for either man. While Markson tosses various projects around at No Inc., Halliburton is getting ready to launch a godchild of sorts to Advertising.com. That company, **Deconstruct Media**, will aim to help Web sites make more money from the advertising space they sell.

Markson said the key to developing a strong startup in a rapidly maturing tech industry is mainly to keep it simple. And that's why he keeps high, yet realistic, hopes for Cogmap.

"If nobody else is doing it and it seems so obvious, it has a good chance of succeeding," he said.



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Fantail Consulting & Technologies

Baltimore Business Journal - by [Gary Haber](#) Staff

As Pat Pathade likes to say, "It's not about the software. It's about how to use the software."

Pathade's company, **Fantail Consulting & Technologies**, based in Ellicott City, customizes existing software to fit the specific needs of customers. The company, which Pathade launched over the summer, is targeting trade associations and customers in the event-management industry.

Fantail recently launched a product called EventSalesFA that makes it easier for companies to manage renting exhibition booth space at trade shows, conventions and conferences. Among the things Fantail's system does is automatically route online inquiries about booth space to the appropriate salesperson, e-mailing a response to the potential exhibitor and prompting the salesperson to follow up within a certain time frame.

That kind of customized computer solution works well when many trade associations have cut staff in response to declining membership.

"It's a model that plays very well in the business community," said Michael Hatch, Fantail's president.

Hatch and Pathade previously worked together at **A2Z Inc.**, a software company in Columbia, where they worked with clients in the event-management industry. After launching Fantail, Pathade brought in Hatch to handle sales and marketing.

J. Spargo and Associates, an event management company in Fairfax, Va., that puts on about 100 trade shows and conferences a year, has found that Fantail's software has saved the company money and made its salespeople more efficient.

"Our salespeople are able to close more sales, and they're not spending as much time on paperwork as they did in the past," said James Spargo, the company's senior vice president.

SEMI, a San Jose, Calif.-based trade association for the semiconductor industry, is another of Fantail's customers. The group puts on about 15 trade shows a year, and handling applications and assigning booth space is a major undertaking.

Fantail is working with SEMI to develop an online application where exhibitors can apply for booth space and receive their assignments online, said Gil McInnes, SEMI's chief operating officer. An online system would require fewer workers and reduce the mistakes that can happen when workers have to input data from e-mailed application forms, he said.

"He's a very pragmatic, astute businessperson," McInnes said of Pathade. "He's a special breed of cat who understands the business very deeply, understands the solutions, and can implement them."

Pathade and Hatch started Fantail with their own funds, kicking in a combined \$125,000.

"Like any other entrepreneurs, we reached into our own pockets," Pathade said.

They're looking for a loan of about \$1 million which they plan to use to hire sales and marketing people, "to get the product out there and into the hands of clients," Pathade said.

Since launching this summer, Fantail has booked about \$680,000 in revenue.

The **National Retail Federation**, a Washington D.C.-based trade association, is considering signing on as a Fantail client, said Susan Newman, NRF's vice president of conferences. In addition to possibly providing computer software to manage the 20 to 25 events NRF holds each year, including an annual trade show at New York's Jacob K. Javits Convention Center that draws more than 18,000 people, NRF is also talking to Fantail about helping it improve its social media initiatives associated with the events. That could include having Fantail handle blogs and Twitter posts to publicize the events, Newman said.



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Fyodor Biotechnologies Corp.

Baltimore Business Journal - by [Julekha Dash](#) Staff

As a child growing up in Nigeria, Eddy C. Agbo saw first hand the devastating effects of malaria.

"A lot of children died from it in my village," Agbo said. "It was traumatic."

Agbo now wants to do something about the disease that kills nearly 1 million people a year.

"Malaria is the daily problem within Africa," Agbo said, "Everyone knows the daily signs."

Last year, Agbo launched **Fyodor Biotechnologies Corp.** that has developed a prototype of a urine malaria test that would aid government workers, travelers and residents in developing countries to determine if they have the mosquito-borne disease. An estimated 18 million travelers visit malaria-infested regions each year.

A urine test will hopefully make it easier for physicians to administer, compared with the alternative method of drawing blood, said Dr. David Sullivan, a microbiologist at the **Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health**. Sullivan is collaborating with Agbo to develop the test.

Having another diagnostic tool to detect malaria that doesn't involve poking would be "lovely," said Carol DeRosa, senior vice president of operations for **Passport Health**. The Baltimore-based company operates a chain of clinics that immunize travelers.

Malaria can be devastating to pregnant women and children in particular, DeRosa said.

"Everyone who walks through this door and gets prepared for travel is going to get counseled on malaria," she said.

This year, Fyodor plans to start clinical trials, relying on researchers at **Johns Hopkins University** and the **Walter Reed Army Medical Center** who will test the product.

By 2014, Agbo hopes to develop a drug to treat malaria and sell the drug and urine test as one product.

Getting there won't be easy. Agbo needs to raise \$2.4 million this year to fund the trials and get the urine test to market in 2011. Fyodor is applying for small business grants from the **National Institutes of Health**, research grants from the **U.S. Army** and is talking to prospective angel investors.

But convincing travelers that they need a malaria test or drug could be difficult. Currently, some travelers take oral medications to stave off the effects of malaria prior to getting on the plane, DeRosa said. Many travelers will never need a test or drug to treat it.

The company has raised \$500,000 through private investors and research grants including the **Maryland Technology Development Corp.** and the **Maryland Industrial Partnerships** program.

MIPS contributed \$89,000 to fund a joint research project between Fyodor and **University of Maryland**, College Park Assistant Professor Ganesh Sriram. Fyodor and the University of Maryland are developing the technology so they can produce the malaria drug artemisinin from yeast. Currently, drugs treating malaria can only be derived from a plant found in China and Vietnam. Manufacturing the drug means that malaria patients and organizations won't be dependent on plant harvest yields — that vary from season to season — to get an adequate supply of the treatment, said Maryland Industrial Partnerships Director Martha Connolly.

"There's an unmet need for malaria drugs," Connolly said. "They are well positioned in a growing market."

This month, Fyodor is moving into a 1,500-square-foot space at the University of Maryland BioPark. Agbo hopes to hire at least two scientists and a research assistant to join the four-person company.

"Things are already rolling in the right direction for us," he said.



Photo by Nicholas Griner, Staff

"Things are really rolling in the right direction for us," says Eddy C. Agbo.

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Mastix Medica

Baltimore Business Journal - by [Gary Haber](#) Staff

When a U.S. soldier on an overnight patrol in Afghanistan needs to fight off sleep, he can pop a piece of Stay Alert, a caffeine chewing gum made by Mastix Medica.

The Hunt Valley company's gum is part of the ration kits the military distributes to soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. Each piece delivers 100 milligrams of caffeine, the same oomph as a cup of regular coffee, and a lot easier to carry than a can of Red Bull.

But keeping soldiers awake is just part of CEO Robert Estey's plans.

Estey, who was an executive in the pharmaceutical industry before launching Mastix Medica in March, sees gum as a faster way of delivering a host of different dietary supplements, a \$30 billion market. He is working with a researcher at the [University of Maryland's](#) pharmacy school on a dietary supplement that would help kidney patients, for example.

"I was looking for something on the niche side of pharmaceuticals and the chewing gum delivery intrigued me," Estey said.

Estey launched Mastix by buying Baltimore-based Koko's **Confectionary & Novelty Co.**'s private label business. Koko's made the caffeine gum and also did contract manufacturing, including making the mints that companies use as promotional giveaways.

Mastix will do \$2 million in revenue in its first nine months, about one third from the gum and the remainder from candy making. Estey expects it to grow to between \$3 million and \$4 million next year. The company has 13 full-time employees, plus two temporary workers.

Mastix's competitors include [Gumrunners Inc.](#), the Hackensack, N.J.-based maker of Jolt Cola, which also makes Jolt caffeine gum.

Estey, 53, won't say how much he paid for the business, citing a confidentiality agreement with the seller. After trying unsuccessfully for bank loans and funding from Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development, he put up some of the money from his own savings and got the seller to finance the rest.

"Even the Small Business Administration told me to come back when I had more of an operating history," he said.

Estey has made some major additions to grow the business. He has hired a full-time marketing person, and added two new flavors of Stay Alert, which now comes in spearmint, cinnamon and arctic mint. And he has brought in five new customers, including [Jakks Pacific](#), a Malibu, Calif.-based toy maker. Mastix makes the mints Jakks uses in its Candy Bead Studio, an edible jewelry making kit for girls, that is part of its Girl Gourmet line. Jakks spends about \$500,000 a year with Mastix.

When Jakks told Mastix it wanted to increase the size of its order because Candy Bead Studio was selling so well, Mastix responded quickly, said Todd Tingley, vice president of sales at Jakks. It added a new candy-making press, added workers and ran double shifts six or seven days a week for almost two months.

"They've reacted as we needed them to," Tingley said. "They've been a great partner."

Maurice Green, vice president of sales and marketing for MMI Outdoor, another Mastix customer, said he is impressed with Estey's responsiveness. MMI Outdoor distributes Mastix's Stay Alert gum to stores on U.S. military bases. The Israeli military will soon be distributing Stay Alert to its forces. But before it would agree to a contract, the Israeli government wanted all sorts of detailed, technical information about the gum and how it worked, Green said. Estey worked tirelessly to provide the data.

"That was a tough nut to crack," Green said. "I was ready to throw my hands up, but Bob hung in there."

Green said he and Estey want to expand the gum's sales to non-military users. They're talking about developing a marketing plan to sell the gum to truckers at highway truck stops.



Photos by Nicholas Griner, Staff

'Chewing gum delivery intrigued me,' says Mastix Medica's Robert Estey.

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Monster Diesel

Baltimore Business Journal - by [Scott Dance](#) Staff

Monster Diesel is speeding growth like a motorcycle fueled with, well, Monster Diesel.

The Cockeysville startup launched in late 2008 selling an eponymous fuel additive that is both cleaner and more powerful than plain diesel fuel. And the company has plans to ramp up its sales this year, even getting the word out to bikers and truckers via television — on the popular show “American Chopper.”

The concept is in line with the ubiquitous wave of “green” business, appealing to individuals and companies trying to reduce their carbon footprints. But the Cockeysville company is also looking to tap broader audiences, such as motorcycle riders who are fans of Orange County Choppers, the New York bike shop that is the focus of the reality show.

The idea for the company came from the research of its CEO, Mat Zuckerman, an inventor with dozens of patents to his name. While Monster Diesel is the product getting the initial launch, the firm is actually called Alkane Inc. Executives have plans for more synthetic fuels in the future.

But they’re starting off with Monster Diesel in earnest in 2010. Deals with truck stops, such as national chain Roady’s Truck Stops, are on the horizon, said Lou Petrucci, vice president for sales and marketing. The company also plans to go after retail consumers and companies that use diesel fuel for heating, farm equipment or boats, he said. Monster Diesel can also be used with biodiesel fuel.

And it will go after the motorcycle market in a Jan. 28 episode of “American Chopper,” which airs on cable network TLC. Diesel is traditionally not powerful enough to fuel a motorcycle, so the Monster Diesel bike — which will first be unveiled in an event in Baltimore Jan. 4 — will be one of the first with a diesel engine, Petrucci said.

Together, Petrucci, Zuckerman and a third business partner, Christina Angel, have put in most of the company’s \$2 million in startup costs. But the company is anticipating \$5 million in revenue and some profit in 2010. A quart of Monster Diesel sells for \$19.99, which Petrucci said is a profitable price.

That growth will also help the company add about 18 people to its staff of seven. Jobs will be in sales, marketing, finance and operations, Petrucci said.

The company is looking to break into the territory of fuel additives made by STP and Lucas, and Angel said the company founders think they have a leg up because of the combination of cleaner emissions and increased power.

Steve Wagner, owner of car repair shop Auto Collision Clinic in Fallston, started using Monster Diesel about three months ago on his two diesel-powered company trucks and his own tractor. He said he had tried most of the products commonly found in auto parts stores to boost power, and he has already started telling friends about Monster Diesel.

“I’ve given it a try, and it’s impressive,” he said. “Nothing has ever given me any noticeable difference, and this stuff has.”



Photo by Christopher Myers, Contributor

Lou Petrucci and Christina Angel expect \$5 million in revenue in 2010.

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Soleil Solar Inc.

Baltimore Business Journal - by [Joanna Sullivan](#) Staff

Andy Maus left **Bear Stearns** six months before its collapse.

The fixed-income bond trader was ready for a career change. He soon had his sights on the renewable energy industry and all the buzz surrounding it. He just needed the right opportunity to make the move.

Maus' search led him back home to Baltimore.

He is now heading **Soleil Solar Inc.**, a startup company that plans to sell solar energy through systems that it both finances and installs. Maus created the new company with **Hawkeye Construction** LLC, a long-time Southwest Baltimore company that was also starting to turn its attention to solar energy.

In a recent interview in Soleil Solar's conference room, Maus and two Hawkeye executives — President Andrew C. Todtz and Construction Manager Chris Ronnebaum — said they are poised to pounce on a marketplace that could be limitless. With solar energy gaining favor in state and national politics — and the cost of the equipment itself dropping — they see a chance to grow a business that would make solar energy a viable option for both homes and businesses.

"I'm a firm believer in solar," said Ronnebaum, explaining why he is venturing into new ground. "I have a utility bill every month. I would like to lower it."

Soleil Solar's goal is to pull in about \$1 million in revenue the first year. That only seems lofty if you compare it to their current revenue — \$0.

"We are in pure startup mode," Maus said. "We have yet to put a shovel to the ground."

Maus worked out a deal with **Solar Power Inc.**, a Sacramento, Calif., company, to become part of its network of dealers. Originally, the larger company had considered franchise operations.

Maus said he preferred the autonomy and the chance to grow a company from scratch.

Soleil Solar is seeking a \$200,000 to \$250,000 U.S. Small Business Administration 7A loan to boost operating reserves. Working with an existing construction company that had the trucks and employees to install solar systems enabled him to save at least a couple million dollars.

Startup costs are exactly what makes solar energy a hard sell for many potential customers.

Plunking down hundreds of thousands of dollars up front is often a deterrent to a sale. Federal and state incentives such as grants and tax credits help ease that pain a bit, but not much.

That's why Soleil Solar is offering long-term leases on equipment that doesn't require upfront financing. Under such a plan, the customer would then agree to purchase all electricity produced over a certain period of time. Soleil Solar would monitor the energy usage. The customer could eventually buy the system. The company's subsidiary, Soleil Funding, handles the financing aspect of the business.

Maus has modeled his strategy after competitors, of which there are many. Standard Solar Inc., **Chesapeake Energy** and Greenspring Energy are three of its biggest local competitors.

Peter Lowenthal, executive director of the Maryland-D.C. and Virginia Solar Energy Industries Association in D.C., said the field is only going to get more crowded as governments impose renewable energy regulations. His association has grown from 30 members in 2003 to 160.

Companies entering the field need to be aware that the payoffs might be a long time in coming.

"Anybody getting into this business needs to have that kind of outlook," Lowenthal said. "It's not a get-rich-quick scheme."

He said the renewable energy industry needs companies, like Soleil Solar, that have the ability to merge finance and construction skills together. "This company sounds like a pretty good prospect."



Photo by Christopher Myers, Contributor

'We are in pure startup mode,' says Soleil Solar President Andy Maus.

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Single Carrot Theatre

Baltimore Business Journal - by [Julekha Dash](#) Staff

Three years ago, a handful of recent college graduates were looking for a city to start a new theater troupe.

These friends from Colorado scouted 50 potential locations for their new arts venture. Their wish list: a city that is inexpensive, supports the arts, is on the “upswing,” and where a group of 20-somethings can make an impact.

They wound up choosing Baltimore to house the fledgling **Single Carrot Theatre**.

Baltimore beat out finalists Philadelphia, Austin, Texas, and Columbus, Ohio. And Charm City won because of the warm reception by its local theater community, Single Carrot Managing Director Elliott Rauh said.

“Baltimore just gave us an overwhelmingly welcome feel,” he said. Some other cities, like Austin, gave them the cold shoulder.

What did Baltimore get in return? A theater company that has grown its subscription base ninefold in the past year, from 33 to 300 subscribers in its third season. It’s won accolades from local media and arts leaders, including Baltimore Museum of Art Director Doreen Bolger.

And they have no plans to stop growing. In five years, the theater operators want to own a space in the Station North Arts and Entertainment District where they currently lease space. They sell out many shows at their current space, which seats 50, and are on the hunt for a theater that can hold 75 to 115 seats.

To move into bigger space, Single Carrot needs to grow its operating budget from its current \$127,000 to \$500,000. To do that, it needs to hit up more foundations and private donors. With that extra money, they also hope to add more staff to the semi-professional theater.

Currently, Rauh is the only full-time staff member. The theater would like to add at least two part-time staffers and pay their actors more than a small stipend.

Initially, Single Carrot could not rely on grants from foundations because most foundations won’t give money to an arts organization that is less than three years old. So Single Carrot had to tap family and friends, write a lot of letters seeking donations and sell a lot of subscriptions.

The latter meant Rauh spent four hours a day for two weeks calling theater patrons in the database to convince them to buy a subscription.

Selling got easier when the **City Paper** named it the “Best **New Theatre Company**” in 2008.

The fact that Single Carrot managed to grow on its own even before any foundation help is what led the Baltimore Community Foundation to give it \$2,000, said Melissa Warlowe, program officer for arts and culture funding.

Foundation members were impressed that the theater troupe kept its costs low by relying on Facebook and Twitter to promote the plays and using a cell phone as the ticket office.

It also helps that the BMA’s Bolger is a fan.

Single Carrot members credit Bolger for raising the new kid on the block’s profile in the community.

Though Baltimore is welcoming, it’s also the kind of town where you need someone to help you make connections, get donations and stand out from the competition. And Bolger has been that person, Rauh said.

Bolger said she talks about the theater every chance she gets at dinners, cocktail parties and on her blog. She sometimes takes a group of people to the show.

Locally, the theater scene is dominated by Centerstage, known for its quality sets and sometimes getting nationally known television actors to appear in its plays.

Everyman Theatre sells out many plays and plans to move into a bigger space on the city’s west side for the 2011-2012 season. The city is also home to an array of smaller community theater groups, including the Theatre Project, Spotlighter’s Theatre, **Fells Point Corner Theatre** and the Mobtown Players.



Photo by Christopher Myers, Contributor

Nathan Cooper, left, and Elliott Rauh founded Single Carrot Theatre.

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Still, Single Carrot's performances stand out in a crowded house, said Bolger, who said she was impressed by the avant-garde performances.

In December, Single Carrot featured "Illuminoctem," which includes dance and music and movement — but no spoken word. Other plays include modern interpretations of classic plays like Richard III.

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Baltimore Business Journal - January 4, 2010
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TheraPearl

Baltimore Business Journal - by [Heather Harlan Warnack](#) Staff

Dr. Carol Baltazar always provided bags of frozen peas to her patients after laser work at her Longevity Medical Spa in Columbia.

But that kind of ice pack didn't fly with one local woman.

"She whips out a bag of peas and I said, 'Well, please,' " Gina Dubbé recalled.

After a few giggles, the conversation turned serious and the women decided to look into an alternative cold pack to frozen vegetables.

By 2008, the pair had found a Chinese company that had developed little beads or pearls with heating and cooling properties. From there, the women designed different-sized packs that conform to body parts. They then set out to apply for a patent.

Although they are still waiting for patent approval, Dubbé and Baltazar officially launched TheraPearl this year. Their first orders were placed in the spring and they have formed a relationship with LeadOff in Hanover to handle distribution, sales and marketing.

After showcasing their products — from eye packs to oval-shaped packs — this past summer at Cosmoprof, a cosmetology trade show in Las Vegas, their business took off. They are on track to sell 500,000 packs by year's end. While they declined to disclose revenue, the women said an average piece costs between \$7.99 and \$12.99. More expensive packs, up to \$30 each, are in the works.

"It has been the ultimate small business fantasy," said Dubbé, adding each invested only \$5,000 to start the venture.

Baltazar was simply trying to meet a need for her patients, and Dubbé only wanted to help her doctor. Neither had any idea that their product would catch on in the spa industry.

Denise Klicos, owner of DK Salon and Day Spa in Mt. Washington, said she is testing out TheraPearl packs to use with her clients. She has used one to relieve horrible headaches, saying it worked perfectly. "They hold on to temperature," Klicos said.

But the salon and spa owner questioned whether each pack needs a cover and whether the product is safe to use on the faces of people who may be prone to allergies.

Dubbé said each pack is latex-free and non-toxic, a requirement in the development phase since Baltazar specializes in non-surgical cosmetic procedures and wanted to use the products on her patients.

The pair is getting ready to launch a medical division in January. The products, including new packs with cartoon characters and a set for backs and necks, will be marketed to pediatricians and other doctors.

Then, in the spring, Dubbé and Baltazar will take their venture overseas and launch their products in Italy, using the country as a test market for Europe.

The timing is right for Dubbé, who is managing partner of venture capital firm **Walker Ventures**. Howard County's Walker Ventures, headed by high-tech entrepreneur Steve Walker, is closing its fund.

Dubbé and her co-founder are committed to the company, even though they always intended it to be a side business or hobby.

"My hope is that at some point, we would be acquired," Dubbé said. "It's still a baby, though."

Looking ahead, the company is on track to sell at least 1 million packs in 2010, possibly more.

Both believe they have a unique product and the market is wide open. While Baltazar said CVS does carry a similar pack, she said they are "not the same thing."

"Really, our only competition are the peas on your grocer's shelves," Dubbé said.



Photo by Nicholas Griner, Staff

Dr. Carol Baltazar, left, and Gina Dubbé came up with TheraPearl's ice pack after Dubbé scoffed at using a bag of peas for pain relief.

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