

Innovation and Entrepreneurs: Innovative Access Optics builds momentum, worldwide reputation

Innovation and Entrepreneurs columnist Tom Walker write about Access Optics, a 20-person manufacturing and engineering firm, located in Broken Arrow, OK, that develops precision optics for the surgical imaging industry.

BY TOM WALKER  0
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One of the great things about an innovation economy is that when a company gains expertise and earns a reputation as an innovator, momentum develops.

Take Access Optics as an example. This 20-person manufacturing and engineering firm, in Broken Arrow, develops precision optics for the surgical imaging industry.

“Last year, more than a million people who underwent surgeries benefited from our products,” said Bob Hogrefe, co-founder and president of Access Optics. “If you are going in for a minimally invasive surgical procedure, there is a one-in-three chance that you are going to be under optics that we supplied.”

Access Optics provides advanced solutions to five of the world's 10 most notable manufacturers of colonoscopy, arthroscopy, and laparoscopy instruments — multibillion-dollar, multinational, Fortune 500 companies.

We first got to know Access Optics when the firm used nanotechnology to develop a superior seal for endoscopic instruments. The company now is about to launch a significant product development phase that includes constructing a 20,000-square-foot facility in Broken Arrow.

“We have contracts with significant customers who want us to supply sizable quantities of very complex optical components,” Hogrefe said. “We will be adding 20 to 30 people performing high-level technician work. When we complete this expansion, we will be a force to be reckoned with in the markets we serve.”

The project also includes repatriating work that has, to this point, been done offshore — a familiar undertaking for Access Optics.

“We have earned our stripes, through good and bad times,” Hogrefe said. “We have provided our customers with outstanding product. Time after time, we've given them what they needed. Now that they see a fresh opportunity, we are going to be the ones to carry this through.”

And this is my point about momentum.

“We are talking about ordinary Oklahomans, myself included, doing very extraordinary

things,” Hogrefe said. “We are Oklahoman to the very last person, facility and product. We have done it all with people that we hired and trained here.”

And what if Access Optics needs to import expertise that the company can't find in Oklahoma? Hogrefe sees that as an opportunity, too.

“It just means that we'll bring some fine ‘new Oklahomans' into our state,” he said.

And that's the way it works. Innovation begets innovation.

Tom Walker is president and CEO of i2E Inc., a nonprofit corporation that mentors many of the state's technology-based startup companies. i2E receives state appropriations from the Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science and Technology. Contact Walker at i2E_Comments@i2E.org.



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