



## Michael Davidson's Unique Artwork Leads to New Tallahassee Start-Up Company

Michael W. Davidson, an award-winning research associate at the National High Magnetic Field Laboratory and one of the world's foremost experts in the field of optical microscopy, has joined with Florida State in signing a non-exclusive license agreement that will allow a Tallahassee-based business to market Davidson's colorful, laboratory-produced artworks as home or office décor.

### FSU Press Release:

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. -- A Florida State University research scientist who has long explored the artistic and commercial possibilities of his work in the laboratory is at the center of a new business venture that will expose his innovative images to even wider audiences -- and demonstrate the economic viability of creative work developed on a university campus.

Michael W. Davidson, an award-winning research associate at the National High Magnetic Field Laboratory and one of the world's foremost experts in the field of optical microscopy, has joined with Florida State in signing a non-exclusive license agreement that will allow a Tallahassee-based business to market Davidson's colorful, laboratory-produced artworks as home or office décor.

"One of our goals is to bring the amazing images that we see in the microscope to the general community," Davidson said. "Photomicrographs of ordinary things, although not scientifically relevant, help bring microscopy to folks who otherwise would never be exposed to this beautiful world."

Florida State's vice president for Research, Kirby W. Kemper, says the licensing agreement is one example of how the university is seeking creative new ways to work with the business community.

"We are learning how to take the efforts of researchers, carefully built up over the years, and work with an entrepreneur to create a new business, or expand an existing business, which can add to the local economy," Kemper said.

This isn't Davidson's first venture into the world of commerce. Starting in the early 1990s, he found a creative way to fund his laboratory by licensing images of proteins, vitamins, live cells, and other biologically and chemically interesting materials taken under a microscope to, among others, a necktie company. The Cocktail Collection was born out of that effort and went on to sell more than 5 million vibrant neckties across the United States.

The new business, BevShots MicroArt LLC, has just begun selling high-quality prints of images that Davidson created by photographing crystallized samples of various types of beers, wines and cocktails under a microscope. The resulting molecular images, all quite distinct from one another, typically feature vivid mixes of colors and patterns that wouldn't look out of place in an abstract art gallery.

If the initial product line is successful, BevShots president Lester Hutt said other categories of colorful photomicrographs produced by Davidson -- vitamins or amino acids, for example -- may also be considered in the future.

With a state grant for its Office of Research, The Florida State University is building a pipeline filled with this and other projects, some of which may successfully emerge as the basis for new start-up companies based in Tallahassee.

One such entrepreneur is BevShots' Hutt. He described himself as "thankful to have found this opportunity at FSU where I can start up a company that channels national sales dollars into the local economy while also allowing me to professionally develop local college graduates.

"We hope this model can be an inspiration for higher education institutions all over the country, as it's a win-win situation for communities' local talent, businesses and universities," Hutt said.

He added that his company has three economic development goals:

1. Show that successful businesses can be started that take advantage of the amazing number of creative ideas coming out of universities;
2. Stop the "brain drain" of talented college graduates by providing them with local employment opportunities; and
3. Provide a product that is made in the United States and price-competitive to goods that are manufactured and imported from overseas.

"Lester has the eclectic entrepreneurial experience to build a business based on leading-edge research for the Twitter- and Facebook-generation marketplace," said John Fraser, Florida State's assistant vice president for research and economic development and executive director of its Office of Intellectual Property Development and Commercialization. "We're optimistic that BevShots can help lead the way in showing what can be accomplished when university research enters the market."

Although it only recently opened shop, BevShots already has added one new job to the local economy. Valerie Wickboldt, a 2008 graduate of Florida State's public relations program, has joined the company as its marketing and public relations director. She said her hiring demonstrates that a Florida State graduate can stay in Tallahassee because of the growing array of interesting employment opportunities.

"With the news saturated with stories of the struggling economy, it's refreshing to see companies like BevShots take a risk despite current economic obstacles," Wickboldt said. "It's allowed and inspired me to reinvest in this community, and I'm happy to say I'm here to stay for the long term."

Although perhaps best known for his educational websites and commercial ventures, Davidson's work in the laboratory goes well beyond the marketplace. With a background in molecular biophysics, his scientific interests include the development of new fluorescent proteins to probe the intricacies of living cells and super resolution microscopy to examine biological structures with precision never before realized with optical microscopy. He has published widely in prestigious journals such as Nature, Science, and Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Davidson's photomicrographs have appeared on the covers of more than 2,000 scientific, industrial and popular periodicals and books, and he has written or been the subject of more than 100 articles on the subject of art in science in popular scientific and photography magazines including Popular Science, Scientific American, Popular Photography, National Geographic and Discover. In addition, his photomicrography has won more than 40 awards in scientific and industrial photography competitions, and Davidson is the only two-time grand prize winner of the Polaroid International Photomicrography Competition. His "Molecular Expressions" Web site offers a wealth of information about imaging and microscopy.