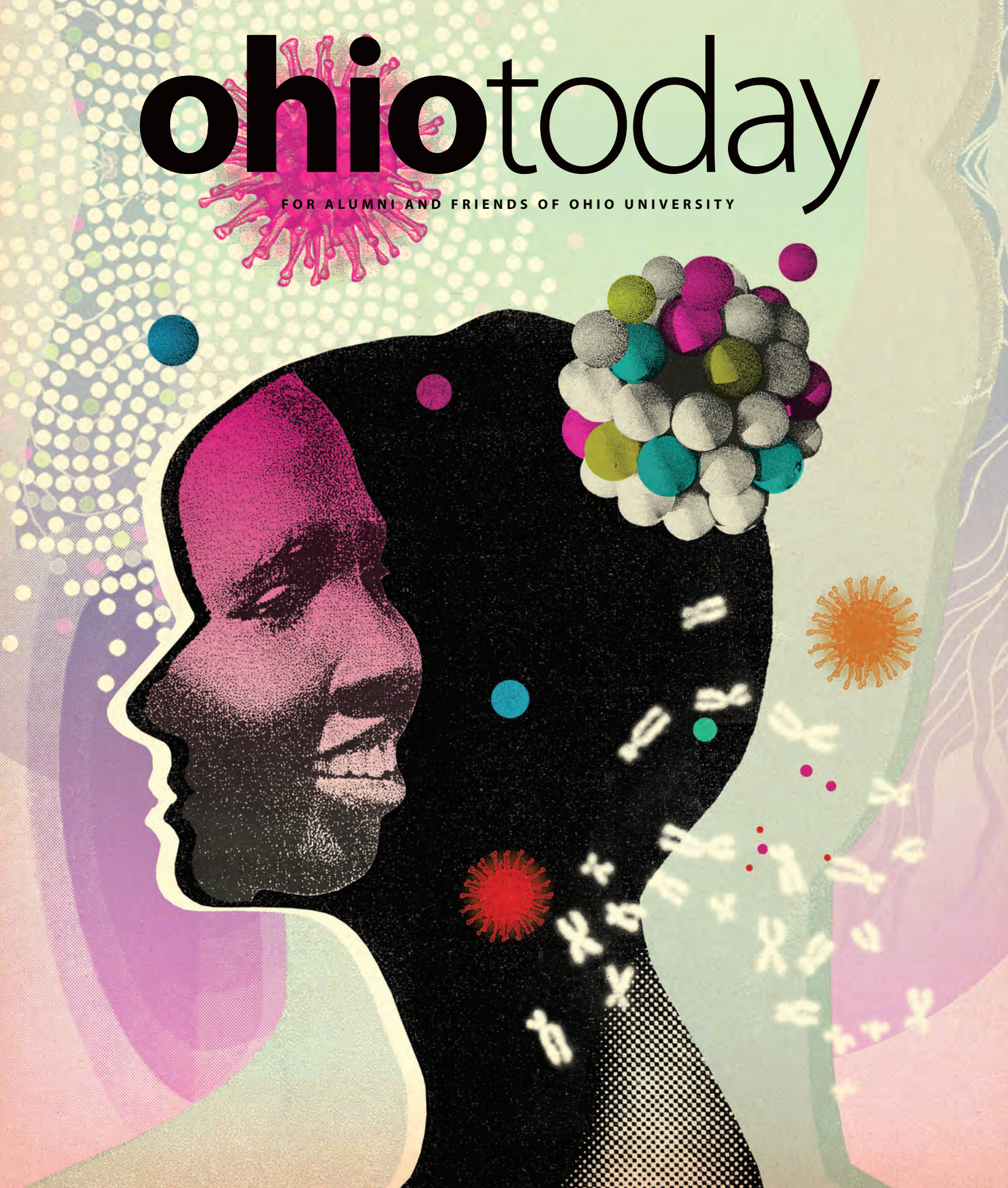


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FOR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS OF OHIO UNIVERSITY





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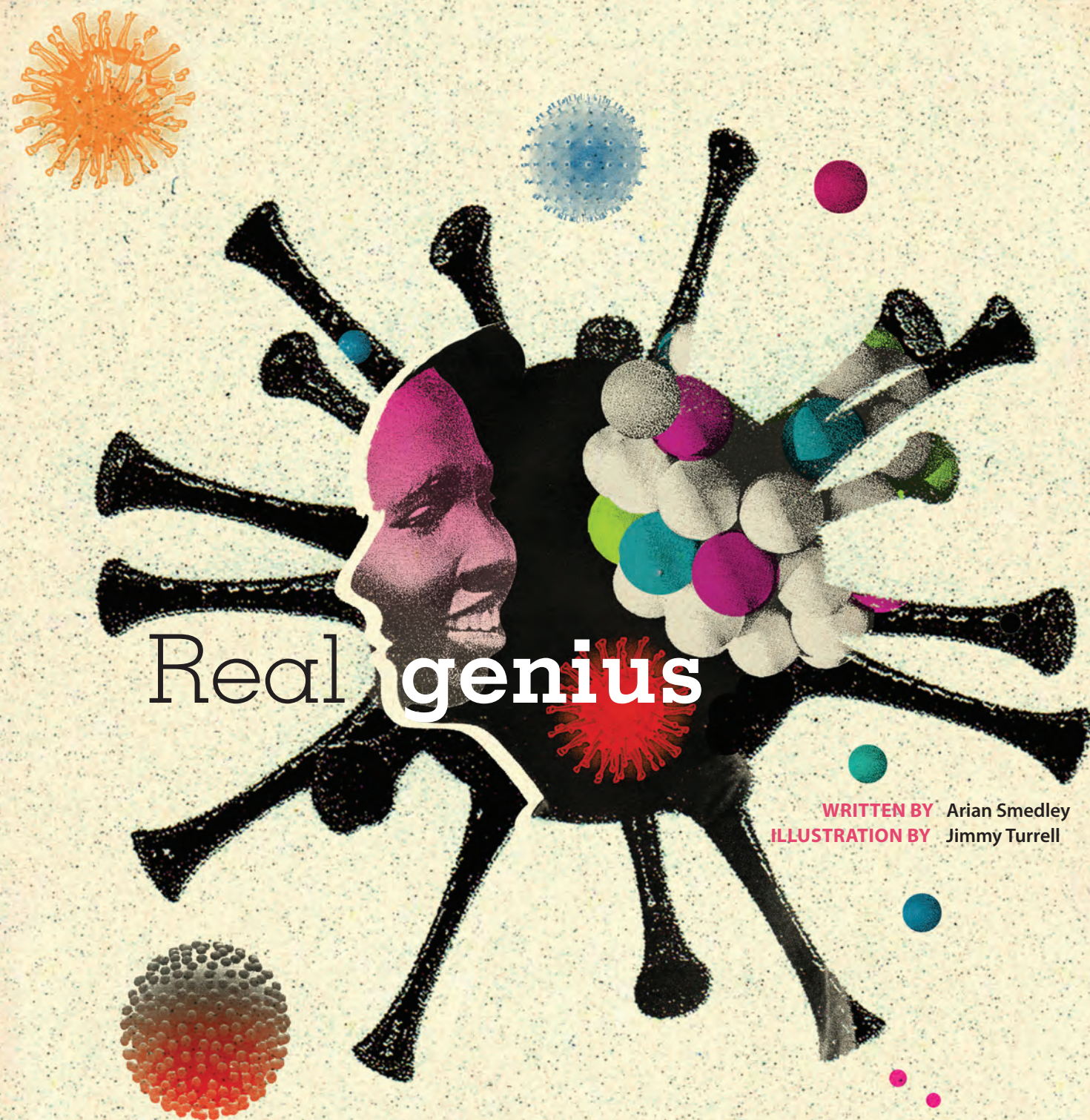
30 The Bobcats' own Chad Brinker, BSS '03, is going pro — "professional," that is — with the help of a No. 1-ranked Ohio University degree tailor-made for the sports industry.

Ohio University's Innovation Center has played a crucial role in the development of more than 100 companies; read more on page 24. **LEFT:** Alan Schaaf, BSCS '10, created the website Imgur in 2009 as a junior. It's now the 27th most-visited site in the nation. PHOTO BY PETER MCCOLLOUGH BSVC '08
COVER ILLUSTRATION BY JIMMY TURRELL

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Real genius

WRITTEN BY Arian Smedley
ILLUSTRATION BY Jimmy Turrell

How Ohio University leads at technology commercialization efforts and what that means for entrepreneurial success

OHIO UNIVERSITY HAS CREATED A CULTURE IDEAL FOR PUSHING AN IDEA INTO A FLOURISHING BUSINESS: IT HAS INCUBATED AND SUPPORTED HUNDREDS OF COMPANIES, CREATING THOUSANDS OF JOBS. IT HAS HELPED FACULTY ISSUE PATENTS AND PROCESS PATENT APPLICATIONS. ITS SUCCESSES HAVE MADE THE UNIVERSITY A NATIONAL LEADER IN COMMERCIALIZATION EFFORTS AND LICENSING.

Near his office at Ohio University's Innovation Center in Athens, Joseph Kittle Jr., BS '80, walks down the hall to a locked door. He punches in the access code and enters the room. Once inside, he finds himself surrounded by a collection of high-tech equipment of all different shapes and sizes — his very own “cave of wonders.”

Centrifuges, ovens, freezers that reach temperatures 80 degrees below zero, sterilizing equipment, purification devices, incubators. The list goes on.

“This is equipment you'd see in programs like ‘CSI,’ ” Kittle says.

This isn't a scene in an American crime drama, however; it's just a regular day at the office for Kittle and his team. While he doesn't use all of this equipment every day, having access to it was essential for starting up his biotechnology company. Part of his rent pays for access to this equipment room, which has given his young business a competitive advantage.

Providing access to equipment like Kittle's is just one example of how Ohio University is leading the way for entrepreneurial success. “When

starting out, you want to have substance right away,” Kittle says. “When investors come here, they see we have everything a full-fledged company has, and more.”

Of course, there's always a risk in starting a business, Kittle adds, even with the right equipment. “That's the way it's supposed to be. If some of your businesses aren't failing, you're probably not taking enough risk.”

Ohio University's support does give innovators a competitive advantage: Since the university's Innovation Center was founded in 1983, it has incubated nearly 100 companies that have created more than 1,000 jobs, according to Ohio University's 2013 Economic Impact Report. The same report revealed the university generated \$1.5 billion in economic impact in the state of Ohio in 2012. One company alone — former Innovation Center occupant Diagnostic Hybrids Inc., a medical testing kit company — recently generated \$35 million for the university when it was sold to a California firm in 2010.

The university's success isn't limited to the Innovation Center, which is currently home to 19 member companies and organizations. The university has created a culture, a

network, an ecosystem ideal for pushing a seed of an idea into a successful business. For example, since its founding in 1991, the university's Technology Transfer Office, which works with startups and established businesses to move new technologies from laboratory to market, has helped faculty issue 110 patents and process an estimated 275 patent applications. Those successes have made Ohio University the top university in the state for licensing revenue generated from research discoveries.

There's more: Since 2007, the university has worked with more than 500 client companies led by faculty, students and regional entrepreneurs through a state-funded venture development organization known as TechGROWTH Ohio. Those relationships generated more than \$143 million from sales, states the Economic Impact Report. The university also works with venture capital and investment funds and operates the Small Business Development Center at Ohio University. The SBDC@Ohio University assisted regional client companies in obtaining more than \$21.6 million in capital infusion.

“The concept of Ohio University as a driving economic force is a commitment we embrace,” says President Roderick J. McDavis. “Since our founding in 1804, Ohio University has played a pivotal role in the development of Southeast Ohio, and our service to the region and the state continues.”

How did this happen? What is the secret to Ohio University's success? *Ohio Today* will take you through the experiences of three companies that exemplify a small slice of Ohio University's support system through the Innovation Center and what it

has to offer budding business creators.

We'll start out on the West Coast, where Imgur founder Alan Schaaf, BSCS '10, settled his business after getting his start as a student at the university.

Then, we'll travel back to Athens, to learn why Kittle chose to grow his biotechnology company, Molecular Technologies Laboratories, near his hometown.

Lastly, we'll touch base with current student Brian Adams, who is behind the development of one of the younger companies cultivated out of Ohio University: MyCampus.

Point and click:

From your camera to Imgur

Alan Schaaf created his company, Imgur (pronounced "imager"), in 2009, as a junior studying computer science at Ohio University. Imgur is an image-hosting website where users can easily upload and share funny or interesting images with the rest of the Web. They can also participate in the Imgur community by commenting and voting on other images, contributing to the creation of the main gallery that displays the most viral images of the day.

At the time, the concept of user-curated content wasn't new. Reddit and Digg were already known for creating spaces where users could highlight the best in viral content. But Schaaf found a flaw. Those sites didn't have ease of use when it came to working with images.

Schaaf's goal was, quite simply, to create a free image-hosting site that didn't "suck," as he put it. Based on the numbers, he succeeded. Just four years after its creation, the website receives 93 million unique visits a month — and that number is steadily growing. It's now ranked as the 27th most-visited site in the nation, 75th in the world, according to the Web information company Alexa.

As popularity grows, so does his staff. He now has nine full-time employees, seven of whom are alumni of Ohio University. Not bad for someone who didn't set out to start a business in the first place.

"It was just something cool I wanted to do on my free time," Schaaf says, explaining how the idea came to be. He initially shared his creation with the world in a post on Reddit, where he asked users to check it out and provide him feedback.

"They liked it, and then they loved it," Schaaf recalls. "When it reached the front page (of Reddit), even more people got to see it."

Within six months, fans of the site started sending donations to keep it running. For the next year, Schaaf spent his free time fixing bugs and operating Imgur. Even at that point, he didn't consider it a business venture. "I just liked that people were using my stuff," he says. "I wanted to make it as good as possible."

As bandwidth and server costs increased, Schaaf decided to accept advertising on the site. Once he found himself earning about \$100 per month, it suddenly dawned on

him that Imgur could be so much more than a labor of love.

By Schaaf's senior year, Imgur's popularity exploded on Reddit. He caught the eye of a Facebook representative, who invited Schaaf to participate in a panel at South by Southwest, an annual Austin, Texas-based conference that partly focuses on emerging technology.

Seeing the value in the invite, the Russ College of Engineering and Technology paid for the trip. It was a remarkable moment for Schaaf: "There I was, still in college, and I was already on a panel with representatives of Facebook, Twitter and Reddit, and moderated by TechCrunch, talking about my experiences with scaling up the site."

Back in Athens, news of Schaaf's ventures out in Texas caught the eye of Matt Strader, BBA '99 and MBA '11, who was an executive-in-residence (or business coach) at Ohio University's Innovation Center.

As an executive-in-residence, it was Strader's job to find fledgling companies that had the potential to succeed with a little guidance in managing the business side and securing investment capital. He saw that in Imgur.

"We met at the Front Room and talked about the vision for the site," Strader recalls. "We got along great; we had a shared vision. We started meeting on a regular basis, running through stats. We did get a little bit of grant funding to help with growth, but it was small."

Strader's knowledge and expertise proved priceless, Schaaf says. While he focused on the business, Schaaf could zero in on perfecting the product. It's a partnership that continues to this day. Strader joined Imgur full-time as the company's chief operating officer in April 2011.

After graduation, Schaaf stayed in Athens for about a year before moving the company to Silicon Valley, where he could meet face-to-face with like-minded early adopters of new technologies.

From Imgur's main downtown office in San Francisco, Schaaf and Strader watch their site continue to grow organically, as it did in its early days. Mobile is the latest buzzword in their world. Thirty-five percent of the site's traffic comes from some type of hand-held device, which is why they launched their first mobile product earlier this summer.

"We are continuously building out Imgur as an entertainment platform," Schaaf says. "It's a lot like a YouTube for images: Just sit back and be entertained."

MTL's factories:

The benefits of bacteria

The nature of a business will dictate what support is needed. With Imgur, for example, Schaaf could do a lot of work independently of others: He created the code, and bought a domain name and server space. Support was needed after-the-fact, in business planning.

What about the launch of a biotechnology company? For that, we're talking a half a million dollars in equipment alone. Not impossible to achieve, at least for those like Kittle, who has more than 20 years of experience working in the industry and has already taken two biochemistry companies to exit. But for his third venture, Kittle took another, unlikely route.

After graduating from Ohio University in 1980, Kittle went on to Harvard graduate school and later moved to Texas and then California, to work for contract research organizations. The companies counted government agencies and 18 of the top 20 pharmaceutical companies among their clients. Kittle now is an assistant professor in Ohio University's department of chemistry and biochemistry.

When researching places to start a new business, he found the services at the Innovation Center to be the best option for launching Molecular Technologies Laboratories, a company that engineers bacteria to produce useful products.



Smart from the start

The university's unique ability to turn ideas into successful businesses didn't develop overnight. It took work — a lot of work. It all started in 1983, when Ohio University created the first university-based business incubator in the state and the 12th in the nation.

Key investments

Since officially launching in Southeast Ohio in 2008, TechGROWTH Ohio has worked with 110 Ohio University-related entities, says director John Glazer. The state-funded venture development organization has provided nearly \$2.5 million in funding and helped those companies obtain \$15 million in external resources, such as investments and grants. These types of investments, explains Jennifer Simon, director of the Innovation Center, make it possible for the university to hire critical personnel and purchase high-end equipment, making the center and the university attractive to clients.

Career coaching

Entrepreneurs may have good ideas, but they may not know how to run a business. That's where the Innovation Center's executives-in-residence come in. They act as career coaches to help discuss vision,

planning, investments and other big-picture ideas for fledgling businesses.

Startup weekend

Brian Adams, creator of MyCampus, entered his original idea into Athens' Startup Weekend competition, in which entrepreneurs spend three days learning the basics of starting a business. While he didn't win, he took his feedback to heart and was later selected to participate in the Innovation Accelerator (see p. 29).

Business boot camp

Think you have the next great digital media idea? Apply to the 12-week Innovation Engine Accelerator, a digital media business accelerator program that provides \$20,000 in seed funding, guidance from experienced mentors, technical support and collaborative workspaces. Visit innovationengineaccelerator.com for more information.



Fast Facts: One part Bobcat, two parts ingenuity

- 100 companies have been incubated by the Innovation Center since its founding in 1983
- 110 patents have been issued by the Technology Transfer Office since its founding in 1991
- From 2007 to 2012, \$21.6 million in capital infusion (loans and equity investment) has been generated by the Small Business Development Center at Ohio University for regional client companies
- \$35 million has been received by Ohio University through the 2010 sale of Diagnostic Hybrids Inc., a company that graduated from the Ohio University Innovation Center
- \$143 million in economic activity has been generated in Southeast Ohio since the launch of TechGROWTH Ohio in 2007

Source: Ohio University's Economic Impact Report

"If the center weren't here, I couldn't bring this back," Kittle says from his office at the Innovation Center on the west side of Athens. "I could be a consultant, but that's not the same. (I would rather) employ people and get a business going. Given my experience, I recognized what a good deal this was. For what we pay and what we get, it's an incredible value."

His rent pays for Internet, utilities and communal spaces such as a kitchen, a reception area and conference rooms. The real value is on the state-of-the-art laboratory with rooms full of dozens of high-tech machines ready for him to use.

Access to the Innovation Center equipment made launching easy, he says. As a result, Kittle and his team signed their lease at the center and their first client contract on the same day.

At MTL, Kittle and his team build bacteria designed for a specific purpose, which might be used for a vaccine or for everyday products such as paints, plastics or soaps. "We're designing little microbial factories," he explains.

Here's how it works: Clients, who range from the top pharmaceutical companies to local businesses, present the team with a problem they need to have solved. Kittle's

lab then researches what changes can be made to industrial bacteria to provide a solution. "We really only do four things: We design the genes, make the genes synthetically, insert the bacteria and screen to find the ones doing what we want them to do," Kittle says.

"The screening is a big part of it. We'll look at hundreds, millions or billions of bacteria; whatever it takes."

As this year comes to a close, Kittle and his partners in Columbus have plans to work on their own projects, with the hopes they will spin off additional companies powered by technology developed by the team.

ENTREPRENEURS ADMITTED INTO THE UNIVERSITY'S INNOVATION ENGINE ACCELERATOR ALL HAVE AN EARLY-STAGE BUSINESS IDEA. WITH \$20,000, A DEDICATED EXECUTIVE-IN-RESIDENCE AND COUNTLESS HOURS OF PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE, THEIR GOAL IS TO ACCELERATE THROUGH THE STAGES OF INNOVATION AND ULTIMATELY GET TO MARKET.

Kittle's MTL has been in business for just one year. Because of his low cost of entry, he's already generating profits and is debt free. He's also benefiting the local economy, both by working with area companies and hiring recent graduates from the university. MTL employs eight people.

Kittle has also partnered with Applied Biomolecular Technologies in Columbus, an established company that has complementary technology.

Another benefit to the Innovation Center, he adds, is the professional environment filled with other entrepreneurs who, while they may specialize in different industries, are all facing similar issues working in startups.

What primarily motivates Kittle to build his business in Athens County is less about the business and more about the personal connections. "I want to make money, sure, but I grew up here," says Kittle, who was raised in Glouster. "I just spent the weekend over at my mom's place. Without the center, I couldn't leverage what I've learned and bring it back."

MyCampus connects: Sales go dorm to dorm

Across the hall at the Innovation Center on a summer day, Brian Adams writes notes on a dry-erase board as he discusses with business partner Chelsea Browne the final details for an upcoming presentation. They, along with six other companies, will present their business ideas to a panel of

investors and the general public. It will be the culmination of their 12-week-long program called the Innovation Engine Accelerator.

"The accelerator program is like a specialized, condensed master's of business administration program," says Browne, BBA '13, who majored in marketing.

Entrepreneurs admitted into the summertime program all have a good early-stage business idea for a technological innovation. With \$20,000, a dedicated executive-in-residence (or business coach) and countless hours of professional assistance, their goal is to accelerate through the stages of innovation and ultimately get to market.

For Adams, a current student, and Browne, getting to market means having their iPhone app called MyCampus ready for download.

MyCampus is a social mobile marketplace that gives college students the ability to safely buy and sell items — tickets, textbooks and furniture — to other students right from their mobile phones. By using the latest technology, customers will purchase their products digitally.

No physical dollars will be exchanged, which makes it that much easier and safer for the user, Adams explains. The business will thrive by collecting a 7 to 10 percent fee from each transaction, he adds.

The accelerator program has allowed the duo to spend their summer attending lectures, conducting research and honing their product. It's essentially become a full-time job, explains Adams.

Adams, who is studying creative entrepreneurship and business development, is confident in his company, which he says has already proven itself to be a successful business model. He started the idea as an OU-student-only marketplace online, called BobcatClassifieds.org, which exists to this day.

"When the site reached 2,000 page views in one day during the spring of last year, I knew I was onto something," Adams recalls.

Since its launch, the site has attracted 12,000 unique visits, which is the equivalent of one out of every two students on campus. Adams and Browne have watched their audience migrate to mobile, which is why their mobile app has become the centerpiece of their business plan.

Before the end of the 2013-14 academic year, the two plan to have an active presence at nine universities.

"Brian has the personal drive, and we're able to nurture that drive," says Jennifer Simon, director of the Innovation Center. "We're giving him the opportunity to launch and move forward. I'm eager to see their first go-round with their product and all its iterations."

That brings up an important point. Ohio University's support system doesn't just focus on the idea — it's the people. In fact, Simon calls the people the most important aspect. "The product, the idea, can change," she says. "And it often does. You have to have the right person, or the right team, who can respond to feedback, take it seriously and seek assistance from our executive-in-residence.

"You have to be hungry for it; that's when you know something may be there."

And whether it's business development, investment capital or all-around support, Ohio University will see you through.

For more information about Ohio University's Innovation Center, visit them online at ohio.edu/research/innovation.