

Gecko Robotics Gets \$10K from Ben Franklin

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HERMITAGE, Pa. -- Gecko Robotics, a startup company resulting from a senior engineering project at Grove City College, will receive \$10,000 seed money from Ben Franklin Technology Partners to assist its development of a robot equipped with an ultrasonic test system that can be used to safely inspect boilers at coal-fired power plants.

The team behind Gecko Robotics, Orion Correa and Jake Loosarian, recognized that a full ultra-sonic inspection conducted during regularly scheduled plant maintenance is labor intensive and expensive to conduct. Thus power plants will delay the testing, leading to problems down the road. Some plants have experienced up to six unplanned outages in one year because of cracks in the boiler tubes. With regular robotic inspections, the company could identify tube trouble spots before the pipes actually burst and force a shutdown, they say.

The funds from Ben Franklin will help Gecko Robotics develop a customized robot with UT sensor heads. The startup currently has an order from Scrubgrass Generating Co., a company its principals encountered during their college engineering project, to use their prototype to inspect the boiler and then verify the data output with the plant engineer.

“It’s hard to imagine now that all of this started from a senior engineering project at Grove City College,” said Correa, Gecko’s president. “It’s our goal to use the Ben Franklin funding to get us on the road to setting up a sustainable inspection service platform. We are hoping to find ourselves in the position of conducting annual robotic UT inspections in at least 10 Pennsylvania coal power plants within the next couple of years.”

The company, a graduate of the Grove City College Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation’s VentureLab (under the Highmark Business Innovation Center at Grove City College), is a client of the eCenter@LindenPointe, a business incubator in Hermitage, Pa.

“Having worked with Jake and Orion previously at Grove City College and now at the eCenter@LindenPointe, I am thrilled to see the progress that they have made in taking their business from the idea stage to the seed-funding stage,” said Yvonne English, eCenter executive Director and interim executive director of the Grove City College Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation. “I am also thankful that we have a resource like Ben

Franklin to assist promising entrepreneurs in our region. By providing local startups with the capital that they need to pursue their ideas, Ben Franklin is helping us to attract and retain these companies.”

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