

Oklahoma School of Science and Math boosts innovation, economy

Ryan Dennis, M.D., the founder of Linear Health Sciences, is an Oklahoma physician who grew up on a pig farm in Macomb, OK.

He attended the Oklahoma School of Science and Mathematics and received his medical degree from the College of Medicine at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center. Now, he has founded an Oklahoma company that has developed a break away IV for hospital patients.

There are a lot of "Oklahomas" in that paragraph. It's intentional.

All those "Oklahomas" connect the dots of the opportunity for innovation.

"I watched 'Apollo 13' about fifty times and decided I wanted to be a pilot," Dennis told me, "so at twelve, I saved up my allowance and took pilot les-



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INNOVATION & ENTREPRENEURS

sons. I loved the chapter in the pilot manual about aeronautical medicine," he said.

"Then in a twist of fate, I was diagnosed with a heart condition that required treatment. From then on, there was nothing else for me but medicine," Dennis said.

There were 18 students in Dennis' seventh-grade class. A trusted adviser told him that if he wanted to be a doctor, he needed to go to high school at OSSM.

"OSSM was an eye-opening experience; I realized the benefit

of being surrounded by people who were diverse and different. I met kids whose parents were physicians," he said, "whereas I grew up surrounded by poverty; there were kids on my bus route that didn't have running water."

Dennis continues to support OSSM and is involved in the admissions process.

"OSSM is so perfect for a state like Oklahoma," he said, "where there are so many small communities where exceptional minds run out of classes by the time they are sophomores," Dennis said.

"There is a certain degree of intelligence, but what makes you successful at OSSM and beyond is the work ethic and internal drive. That's what's so impressive about the kids at OSSM, the ones I went to school with, and the ones who are there now."

It's been a whirlwind year of

DID YOU KNOW?

Over half of the Oklahoma School of Science and Mathematics enrollment is from communities with populations of fewer than 10,000. Nearly 85 percent of OSSM alumni pursue collegiate study and professional careers in science, technology, engineering and math.

product development for Ryan Dennis and his co-founders at Linear Health Sciences.

"If you look at the key inflection points of my life," Dennis said, "both of them are the result of support and the benefits of two of Oklahoma's state sponsored programs — iZE, which stems from OCAST initiatives,

and OSSM. It's mind-blowing. They have truly made things possible that back when I was putting piglets under a heat lamp in a garage would never have seemed possible."

Innovation is about dreams, opportunity, and serendipity. All of that, plus "Oklahoma" has marked Dennis' path.

It's tempting to be cynical about state or government sponsored programs. It's difficult to resist severe financial cuts to strategic initiatives given the budget pressure Oklahoma faces today.

An Oklahoma story like this one can help keep us on track.

SCOTT MEACHAM IS PRESIDENT AND CEO OF IZE INC, A NONPROFIT CORPORATION THAT MENTORS MANY OF THE STATE'S TECHNOLOGY-BASED STARTUP COMPANIES. IZE RECEIVES STATE APPROPRIATIONS FROM THE OKLAHOMA CENTER FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY AND IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF OKLAHOMA'S INNOVATION MODEL. CONTACT MEACHAM AT IZE_COMMENTS@IZE.ORG.