

Med tech feeders

Hundreds of unsung manufacturers make the many parts used by the big device makers **BY KEVYN BURGER**

Everyone knows the brands Medtronic, St. Jude Medical and Boston Scientific, the high-profile medical device innovators with deep Minnesota roots.

They are but the tip of the sector's iceberg.

Hundreds of manufacturers that churn out the minuscule parts inside the lifesaving implements are not household names, but Minnesota's red-hot, medical device sector would be cold without them.

According to a 2015 workforce report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Minnesota is home to 605 companies involved in the production of medical devices; they employ some 35,000

workers. That includes the suppliers that reliably deliver the components for the end products.

"Minnesota has the most densely concentrated medical device community in the world, and 96% of its needs can be met by our supplier network here," says Cheryl Matter, vice president of Intelligence & Research for the Medical Alley Association, which promotes the state's health technology sector.

"When we talk to leadership in the industry, they say that the expertise of these manufacturers gives Minnesota its edge," she adds. "When challenges arise, it's a great benefit to be 20 minutes away from a supplier with a great depth of knowledge."

Critical mass

Minnesota's seasoned manufacturing sector proves the old adage that time is money. Statistics compiled by Medical Alley show that it takes an average of 575 days to get a complex medical device to market in the US; firms based in Minnesota best that by an average of 199 days.

"These manufacturers offer a wealth of knowledge in a highly regulated industry," Matter says. "Their experience translates into moving more quickly through the process."

St. Paul based-Minnetronix is one of those companies. Beginning as a three-person startup in 1996 when its trio

of founders left 3M, Minnetronix has expanded to a staff of 300.

"Our growth would not have been possible in another region," says Minnetronix co-founder and CEO Rich Nazarian. "With medical devices, you need to have critical mass, a whole supply chain. We have options and partner networks. There are a lot of advantages in having that cluster, an ecosystem."

From its headquarters in Energy Park, the Minnetronix team works on all phases of product development and manufacturing, with more than 100 medical device projects to its credit.

Whether as contract or OEMs (original equipment manufacturers), suppliers for medical device companies work in a highly regulated industry; the Food and Drug Administration enforces tight controls for quality assurance.

"So many people here have worked with the big med tech companies, and their high standards pervade all levels of the hiring pool," says Nazarian, 55,



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BIZ BRIEFING

MINNETRONIX

INCEPTION: 1996

HEADQUARTERS: St. Paul

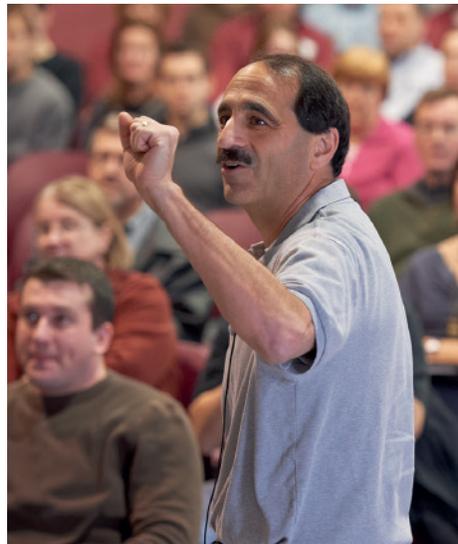
LEADERSHIP: Rich Nazarian, CEO [PICTURED RIGHT]; Jeremy Maniak, COO; Phil Ankeny, CFO

EMPLOYEES: 300

REVENUE: Greater than \$70M

DESCRIPTION: Minnetronix is a medical technology and innovation company with deep expertise in electronic and electromechanical devices. The company creates new technologies and therapies that solve unmet clinical and business needs for patients and medical device companies. Minnetronix is FDA Registered and ISO 13485 Certified.

WEB: minnetronix.com



an electrical engineer and principal inventor on 17 patents. “There’s a mindset and a philosophy in companies and people that have the discipline to operate in this environment. We see it at all levels, whether it’s an engineer or an assembler. They understand what it takes to be in compliance.”

Healthy culture

Devices are reviewed not only by federal regulators, but also by the

doctors who research and recommend them for their patients.

“In our industry, parts change, improvements are found, there’s feedback from the clinical environment,” explains Minnetronix COO Jeremy Maniak. “The tight loop that we have here with client companies and engineering teams is a factor for success.”

Maniak, 41, comes to the executive suite with years of hands-on

engineering and R&D experience; he is a named inventor on ten patents. He believes that the competition between Minnesota’s manufacturers has also spurred the region’s reputation and its consistent high level of performance.

Medical device companies and their partner manufacturers compete not only for clients and contracts, but also for top talent. Medical Alley has identified 120 higher education programs in the state that prepare the next generation to work in the medical device industry. They school workers across the spectrum, from one-year, skills-based programs at technical colleges to advanced university degrees in biomedicine.

“These are very good jobs, not only for those who work in engineering or research and development, but also the machinists who make the parts and those who program these high-tech machines,” says Luann Bartley, workforce development director of the Minnesota Precision Manufacturers Association, the trade association that represents the state’s manufacturers. “It is a chain of opportunity for skilled workers.”

It takes thousands of hours to transform a brilliant idea into a medical device that is ready to be prescribed by a physician or implanted by a surgeon. Products conceived and produced in Minnesota ultimately make their way to patients around the globe.

“Most of the people we hire are industry lifers. They come with passion,” says Jeremy Maniak, COO at Minnetronix. “It’s more than putting widgets together the right way for clients. What we do helps people; we remember why we’re in the business. We see that across the groups we work with. That’s part of the culture here.”