

WILSONVILLE SPOKESMAN

AWAY FROM HOME

■ SAM Medical Products has revolutionized the emergency treatment of broken limbs



JOSH KULLA / WILSONVILLE SPOKESMAN

SAM Medical employees assemble SAM Splints for the U.S. military (above) at the company's new manufacturing facility in Wilsonville.

By JOSH KULLA

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Dr. Sam Scheinberg was a U.S. Army trauma surgeon serving in Vietnam when the idea that one day would make him rich came to him.

While working with MASH units the need for a reliable yet portable device for immobilizing limbs came up time and again. The splints available at the time often were discarded in the field in favor of sticks, branches or even rifle parts.

A few years after returning to civilian medical practice on the Oregon coast, the same need arose. In response, he began using various types of aluminum foil, and found that when it was folded the material's strength was multiplied many times over.

This time, Scheinberg seized the idea and developed a workable prototype, obtained patents on what would become the original SAM (Structural, aluminum, malleable) Splint and began manufacturing out of a small shed outside the tiny town of Yachats in 1985.

Besides him and his wife Cherrie, who managed marketing and distribu-

tion, Scheinberg had four employees working full-time to turn out SAM Splints. He worked on new products in between marathon shifts as one of the central Oregon coast's only orthopedic surgeons.

He started the company with his own savings.

"I understood the risks," Scheinberg said in a 1992 interview with Nation's Business magazine. "I didn't want to see anyone else get hurt."

The new company was called Seaberg, the article recounts, rather

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than Scheinberg, so that if the venture failed, the family name would be safe from ridicule. Shares of Seaberg stock were traded for services, including an attorney who helped set up the company and handled patent applications, as well as a mechanical engineer and former patient who designed the original production machinery.

MOVE TO WILSONVILLE

My, how times have changed.

From humble beginnings, SAM Medical Products has grown over the past quarter-century into a small-business powerhouse and now is an internationally-renowned manufacturer of a wide range of medical devices.

The company's biggest

customer these days is the Pentagon, and nearly a decade of war in Afghanistan and Iraq has meant plenty of business. This is one reason the company has shucked recent economic trends effectively.

So much so, in fact, that SAM Medical now has leased 18,000 square feet of manufacturing and office space in Wilsonville to house corporate offices, a manufacturing plant and research and development labs.

The move took place earlier this month, said Scheinberg. It is meant to improve logistic and shipping capabilities, as well as allow the company access to a deeper employee pool.

"We didn't want to move," said Scheinberg, who will maintain residency

in Lincoln City. "Our goal was always to stay as long as we could in Lincoln County. But Lincoln County has its challenges, they're not insurmountable, but they're challenges."

Shipping product from the coast to Portland for eventual shipment outside Oregon proved to be the biggest advantage of moving, followed closely by the difficulty of locating and retaining skilled manufacturing workers on the Oregon coast.

In addition, the consolidation of the company's former Tigard headquarters with the new factory will eliminate the need for frequent employee travel to and from Newport.

"It's just not efficient," Scheinberg said of the former arrangement. "When

you're operating out of your kitchen those types of things are not magnified that much. But everything grows and everything gets magnified."

GROWTH CONTINUES APACE

Despite the current economic recession, growth has continued at such a pace for SAM Medical that the company recently was included for the fourth year in a row in the Inc. 5000 annual rankings of the fastest-growing private companies in America.

The new manufacturing plant will produce medical devices such as the popular SAM Splint and the SAM Pelvic Sling II, products used worldwide by emergency and military personnel for treating fractures. The company also has developed the Celox line of anticoagu-

lants agents, used to help blood clot during the treatment of wounds.

The new research and development labs will house a variety of equipment used for the development of new products and for the continued improvement of current products, said research and development manager Lance Hopman.

"Fielding new products that save lives or even ones that just address a specific injury is a point of pride for us," he said.

SAM Medical Products launches an average of one new product and one line extension each year. Hopman said the company hopes to meet or exceed that mark in coming years.

"We do tweaks of current products always," he said. "And new products we real-

ly can't talk about, but we're focused on pre-hospital trauma, whether that's on the battlefield, an ambulance or in the wilderness. That's where most of our new products are going to come in."

The Scheinbergs now intend to keep the ball rolling in their new surroundings.

"It's been an interesting adventure," said Sam Scheinberg. "All the way from our kitchen and the shed in Yachats, it's been a good run and we intend to keep it going."

"You feel bad because it's your home," Cherrie Scheinberg added. "We loved everybody and we sort of grew up together. You have a common history and there were lots of long-term employees, but it just became an economic issue ... sometimes it's just time to move on." ■