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- This Week's Issue
- News
- Crain's Awards
- Features
- Lists/Resources
- Columns
- Blogs
- Events
- Video

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Skleros' path to success is problem-solving

By [Tom Henderson](#)



Innovation opportunity has knocked twice for engineer entrepreneur Steven Skleros.

Ann Arbor-based **Accuri Cytometers Inc.** has become something of a poster child for how to spin off university research into real-world products with global reach.

The company was founded in 2004 by Skleros, an associate professor of mechanical engineering at the **University of Michigan**. Co-founder and CEO Jennifer Baird was able to raise \$27 million over the next six years as the company ramped up development and took its devices to market.

Last January, Baird was replaced as CEO by Jeffrey Williams, who had been president and CEO at Ann Arbor-based **HandyLab Inc.**, another UM spinoff that was sold for \$275 million in 2009. Baird joined another Ann Arbor startup, **Accio Energy Inc.**

Ironically, Skleros had no intention of founding a company making medical devices. As a graduate student in the 1990s at the **University of Illinois**, founding a company was the last thing he had in mind.

He was working on a project to reduce contaminants in the oily water used to lubricate and cool the tools that cut and drill metal on the factory floor. One of the major contaminants is bacteria, which thrives in water and poses a threat to workers as water turns into airborne mist during machining.

Skleros devised membranes he hoped would filter out much of the bacteria in the water, but to quantify how well they were working he needed to use one of the university's cytometers, which were huge, multimillion-dollar machines.

Those in charge of the cytometers told Skleros there was no way they would let him run his polluted water through their devices to measure bacteria, not with what they cost to buy and install.

"I thought there has to be a better way," he said.

So Skleros devised a relatively low-cost laser-based fluorescent system for identifying and quantifying bacteria in liquid, which eventually led to the formation of Accuri.

But Skleros was still left with problems to solve. How could you improve the cooling and lubricating process in factory cutting tools? How could you increase tool life by making the cooling liquid cooler? How could you reduce both the polluted water and airborne mist?

By substituting cooled carbon dioxide for water, he thought.

A patent was filed and granted, and in 2010, **Fusion Coolant Systems Inc.** was formed.

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