



## **From the Providence Journal/Evening Bulletin Jan 8, 2006**

Across Rhode Island a number of people have been quietly working to build businesses and further research in technology and life science. This year, after laboring behind the scenes, many of them are poised to make a public impact on two of Rhode Island's fastest growing industries.

The following are some of these "Up and Comers." Whether it's biomedical research or technology innovation, these individuals are ready to dazzle in 2006. The list is by no means exhaustive, it's just a small sampling of people we expect to grab your attention throughout the course of the year.

Art Burghouwt, 42, and Randal Spencer, 53

Executive vice president medical and president & CEO, Concordia Fibers

Coventry

Burghouwt and Spencer are taking an old-line textile manufacturer in Coventry into the world of biomedicine. The two executives are leveraging Concordia Manufacturing's eight decades of expertise in handling specialty fibers and materials to knit, braid and compile fabric that can be easily absorbed by the human body.

The material, which Concordia has dubbed Biofelt, can be seeded with human cells and inserted into the body to grow arteries and other human tissue.

With the company facing increasing price pressure from Asian manufacturers in the traditional fiber market, Spencer began looking for a way to keep the plant and its approximately 60 employees working in Rhode Island. In 2003, he decided that making specialty materials for the biomedical industry was the way to do it.

With investment from Sovereign Bank, Rhode Island's Slater Technology Fund and the Business Development Company of Rhode Island, Concordia put in a clean room that allows the company to produce sterile material. The employees, who have years of "hand smarts" working with fibers and tricky materials, started training to learn how to handle materials that will go in the human body, said Spencer.

Last year, Concordia purchased the Albany International Research Co.'s biomedical product line, including equipment and the processes for making the absorbable material. Spencer also hired Burghouwt, a medical device expert with 20 years of experience in the industry, to head up Concordia's medical business. The company gained international certification as a high-quality producer of medical-grade equipment, and has started working with polymer scientists to figure out ways to add proteins to the fabrics.

In 2006, Burghouwt and Spencer are striving to make the biomedical business profitable, and to grow it to 30 percent of the company's revenue.

Biomedical "is the only way I know how to save the jobs in this plant," said Spencer.