

BIC matches entrepreneurs with researchers

BY KEELY BROWN

Business Report Correspondent

BOULDER — When software entrepreneur Henry Kaplan moved to Boulder several years ago he had retirement in the back of his mind.

One meeting with the Boulder Innovation Center changed all of that.

Kaplan, a developer of children's interactive entertainment software, met with then-director of the Boulder Innovation Center, Doug Collier, who told him about the center's partnership with the Technology Transfer Office of the University of Colorado at Boulder. That's when Kaplan learned about a new software product being developed at CU's Center for Spoken Language Research.

"They called and asked if I wanted to meet with some researchers who had spent six years developing this software to teach children to read," Kaplan said. "I met with them, and I felt that it was an opportunity for a successful product line."

Kaplan made a proof-of-concept presentation to advisers at CU's Technology Transfer Office, or TTO, and received a \$100,000 seed grant — as well as licensing — from CU to develop prototypes and eventually market the product through his company, Mentor InterActive Inc.

Designed for children from pre-kindergarten to second grade, the software utilizes a built-in, child-friendly tutor that recognizes each individual child's voice and interacts with them and teaches them to read in an entertaining and engaging way.

Mentor InterActive is raising equity capital, and Kaplan hopes to have its new interactive learning software on the retail market by second quarter 2008.

"From that first conversation with the BIC, we've come this far in less than a year," he said. "The BIC has always been there to advise us on how to do this. It's been a great relationship."

Tim Bour, the executive director of the BIC who replaced Collier in August, said Kaplan's success story is a perfect example of the type of work the BIC strives for in its partnership with CU's TTO. By serving as a bridge between university researchers and the local business community, the BIC can help launch new businesses based on technologies developed at the university.

"If we feel that the university developers have established a strong patent position, then the BIC provides a service to help them do that," Bour said. "We look at a technical platform and search for the best choices for commercialization of that technology. The BIC acts as a facilitator of that process."

After identifying newly developed university technologies with promising commercial potential, the BIC matches local entrepreneurs with university researchers. The BIC routinely meets with entrepreneurs in Boulder's business community to discuss their interests and future business plans. It later contacts them if a new university technology might meet their product and marketing needs.

The BIC works with 150 advisers — ranging from information technology developers to local entrepreneurs — who assist researchers and new companies in business planning, funding and marketing strategies.

The BIC also partners with CU in its annual Innovation Alliance Breakfast, which gives CU researchers an opportunity to present their projects to the business community. This year's event will take place from 8 to 10:30 a.m., Tuesday, Oct. 16 at the Millennium Harvest House in Boulder.

Bour said the partnership with the TTO was important to his deci-



MICHAEL MYERS

Boulder Innovation Center's new Executive Director Tim Bour, left, helps Henry Kaplan, founder of Mentor InterActive, grow his business.

sion to take the reigns of the BIC.

"It's one of the key reasons I came into this position. It's a unique combination, bringing together some of the world's leading researchers from CU with entrepreneurs in Boulder County. It's good for the economy because people are forming new businesses and new jobs for the community."

The BIC helps businesses through its Technology Transfer Program and its Stage 2 Program for established businesses that typically fit into specific market segments.

The BIC's Technology Transfer Program partners businesses with ongoing technology developed at CU and can include a much broader range of products and services, Bour said.

"Contractually we will take on technology in any market that we mutually agree on."

The typical fee for a Stage 2 client is \$750 per month for six months, Bour said. For the Technology Transfer Program, fees are included as part of an annual contract between the TTO and the BIC.

The BIC, a nonprofit, receives financial support from the Boulder Economic Council, the city of Boulder and the Colorado Economic Development Commission.

Additional funding comes from corporate sponsors and in-kind sponsor Faegre & Benson LLP, which provides office space for Bour.

Corporate sponsors include:

Gold sponsors: Activant Solutions, Boulder Chamber of Commerce, Cooley Godward Kronish LLC, EKS&H, Elevations Credit Union, Hogan & Hartson LLP, Johnson & Kightlinger Graham & CO, RE/MAX Alliance, Hinkelman, Smith & Associates, Taggart Insurance, Wells Fargo, Wendell Walker & Associates and The WW Reynolds Companies.

Silver sponsors: 1st National Bank of Colorado, Advantage Bank, Commercial Brokers of Boulder and Freeman Myre.

Since June 2005, the BIC has helped develop eight Stage 2 and three Technology Transfer companies. These companies represent investment capital totaling \$1,180,000 and 56 new jobs.