

Matt Wyatt with the compression back wrap that will be shipping to customers in early 2018.

YEAR TO REMEMBER

Recovery Force Poised for Big Results

By Tom Schuman

EDITOR'S NOTE: Last of a six-part series with Fishers-based Recovery Force. View the previous articles in the archives section of www.bizvoicemagazine.com

Nearly one year ago, during an initial conversation about the idea (which began formulating in 2013) that would become the basis of a new company, Matt Wyatt couldn't contain his enthusiasm.

Ten months later, when the Recovery Force co-founder, president and CEO and other key members of the team talked about both the past year – and more importantly what is to come – the conversation ended with some eerily similar words.

Wyatt, November 2016: "I'm just excited to be doing what we're doing. I'm probably even more excited today than in the beginning because we've done so much of the heavy lifting. I'm a little surprised that I continue to be this excited on a daily basis."

Fast forward to September 2017: "Maybe I'm not surprised, but it speaks to the individuals and the technology that we've been at it as long as we have and people are still this excited about it. That's a real testament to the purpose of what we're doing. That's hard to sustain; you can't make people do that. It comes from inside the gut or the heart."

Matt Wainscott, co-founder and vice president of operations, adds, "It makes it real easy – when everybody is passionate about it, people want to come work here."

That work continues, at a pace that might be even more frenetic than what it has taken to reach this point. As the team briefly recaps the last few years, the comment is made that "now it's up to the marketing guys." While laughter erupts, there's also the acknowledgment that "there's some truth to that."

And vice president of marketing Greg Downey admits, "From a sales and marketing perspective, it's new – now sales and marketing has something to do. We've got to sell it, create a buzz."

Making progress

The current year began with high expectations. Most, if not all, have been achieved. They include clearance from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), ongoing work with a global contract manufacturer to produce the first product – the compression back wrap that will enhance blood circulation

among other benefits – fundraising of more than \$5 million and additional strategic alignments.

Senior engineer Vince Rizzo offers some perspective on the journey.

"I often use the analogy of a train going down the tracks at 50 to 70 miles per hour and holding on. This is a very exciting start-up for me," he says. "I'm very confident about the technology we've developed. What I've been able to assess – because I've been involved with successful start-ups and not so successful start-ups – and the formula I've been able to derive is it's the people on the team. I've tried to do it on my own, but found it takes a real array of different talents."

Downey notes that Rizzo, with over 50 patents to his credit in his career, is more like "five people rolled into one person." He continues, "Look at the ideal DNA you'd want in a technology, high-speed start-up. It's a small team but those that can wear multiple hats. You can't delegate; you have to do stuff yourself. When Vince tests something, he builds a box rather than buying one. It goes back to the team factor – how do you find good talent that's been in the trenches and avoid the land mines that are out there?"

Director of engineering Jeff Schwegman reveals the process has gone from "understanding the technology ... to the groundwork being laid down for the first product, which then opens the door to all the other ones."

The focus now is creating all the required support systems – e-commerce web site, order fulfillment, customer service and more.

"We have to build those from scratch," Schwegman confirms. "The cool thing is that we all have some different experiences to know what to do. It's awesome to be on the

front end of all that, have a say in being able to make that all happen and be able to make decisions quickly."

When the six team members in this interview were asked whether that prospect was more exciting or intimidating, the unanimous and immediate response was, "Yes, both!"

Strategic approach

While the numbers may be limited (eight full-timers with four new hires expected soon), that can also be an advantage.

"It's daunting sometimes," Rizzo admits. "What I have learned is you have to take one hurdle at a time. If you look at the whole picture, it's overwhelming."

Or, as Wyatt terms it at times, "we're not eating the whole elephant at once."

Downey says previous attempts from large companies at taking nitinol and making it work the way Recovery Force is doing likely "failed because they have a budget, money runs out and they're done. We're just dumb enough not to stop. We didn't have a Plan B. Perseverance is the key, the ability to learn, the ability to pivot, wear multiple hats, work in a team environment and just execute."

Pivoting is critical in the current work, with Downey energized by the prospects.

"I've seen a number of companies just slam into the wall not doing that (reacting to the market)," he asserts. "We're testing through this crowdfunding campaign, where we can literally pivot on a video within 24 hours, pivot on our ads within hours, get this real-time market feedback before we're ever shipping a unit."

"We will launch on every social platform known to man at this point. All that data will come back to us. We're testing these ads, the



Team members (from left) Jeff Schwegman, Matt Wainscott, Matt Wyatt and Greg Downey plan the next steps for Recovery Force.



Senior engineer Vince Rizzo demonstrates a product under development for the calf.

messaging, people are registering and giving you their information.”

A kickstarter campaign, public relations efforts and affiliate marketing programs are among the additional efforts. “We’ll flip on our own e-commerce platform. We’ll get units in December and ship in January. Now, we’re on our own skis and we’re going to floor it. A lot of big brands ignore what buyers are saying.”

Wyatt chimes in with the reminder, “It’s not only that we are transitioning to that stage, but we’re not stopping what we already started. We’re not slowing down engineering, innovation or research.”

Seeing is believing

Another contributing factor to the ongoing – even building – anticipation is people being able to wear the products and experience the benefits.

“What’s exciting right now is that the technology is starting to get recognized by a lot of people. People are seeking us out,” Wainscott shares. “When you have an opportunity to display the technology to the people we want to get to and they’re excited ... that just means we’re going to get there.”

Rizzo poses the questions: “How do you sell a smell? How do you sell a feel? It’s a challenge.”

Wyatt: “We use the phrase experiential a lot. It’s one thing to see this online, on video or read the content. It’s one thing to do that and kind of get it. It’s a whole other thing to experience the technology. These guys (during a recent visit at one of the leading health care organizations in the world) were very informed when we got there. When they physically wore it, it was – I don’t know how to describe the reaction.”

A final contract is not in place (as of the deadline for this issue) for a wearable calf product to be used for medical purposes. But the day after Wyatt and Wainscott made that trip, they received very positive feedback about the intent to move forward.

Wainscott describes the in-person atmosphere and reaction.

“They were very cordial, professional and interested in engaging on the front side. That just continued at another level when we were there – to the point of when we walked out and I said (to Wyatt),

‘They were selling us.’

“The other point where we knew they were interested was the statement: ‘You have the decision-makers right here. There’s no committee. We decide how this moves forward.’ ”

Wyatt details that the medical calf application is being prioritized due to the high level of interest. It will complement the direct-to-consumer products in pain management. The intended path of development from the initial back product is to the “sports calf version. Following that, we just work our way up the body – knee, quad, then upper extremities.”

Another potential external partnership involves one of the country’s leading shoe manufacturers. A meeting there evolved to include four decision-makers with all indications, according to Wyatt, “that it’s moving in the right way. We would license to them and they develop a shoe based on our technology.”

Manufacturing model

A formal manufacturing agreement was put into place earlier in 2017 with Jabil, one of the largest contract manufacturers in the world. The St. Petersburg, Florida-based company is a \$19 billion organization with more than 120 facilities in 29 countries.

The partnership is additional proof of the tremendous potential of Recovery Force.

“They look for platform technologies. If we were just a back product, they would have no interest in us,” Wyatt discloses. “The fact that they want to be our contract manufacturer is a testament to our technology. They see the opportunities in a global marketplace.”

Jabil brings an extra ingredient to the mix, according to Schwegman.

“Most contract manufacturers are equipped for software, electrical and mechanical. These guys bring those three plus the textile piece. They acquired a company out of Finland, a leader in incorporating electronics into wearables.”

While Wyatt terms it a learning process for both organizations, “The starting point for the integration began at a much higher level. They (leaders at Jabil) said: ‘This is not typical.’ They don’t

normally receive technology at the level our guys transferred it over.”

Speed of business

At the time of this interview, Eric Griffith was in his fourth week at Recovery Force as senior product development engineer. He had been about 18 months into a 30-month project at his previous employer, a large organization with the required decision-making levels and processes.

“The speed that these guys have been going at is really impressive. It’s exciting to be part of it,” he exclaims.

And while speed might not be the first thing that comes to mind – recall that this adventure started four-plus years ago with Wyatt working on potential ideas in his basement – groundbreaking business developments are not an everyday occurrence.

“Going fast is a differentiator between us and larger companies, but we’re not going fast at a risk,” Wyatt concludes. “We followed FDA guidelines; we followed quality systems. To not miss anything and still be going as fast as we are, that takes a lot of discipline and commitment.”

While the Recovery Force story has been told on these pages over the past year, it’s clear that the best is yet to come.

RESOURCE: Recovery Force at www.recoveryforceusa.com