



Friday, October 23, 2009

## Artaic founder and CEO Acworth doubles in paranormal investigating

By Galen Moore

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Boston entrepreneur Ted Acworth has never really held a job you could call “normal.”

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His current company, Artaic LLC, does robot-made mosaic installations and counts two Boston hospitals among its growing list of customers. With his work at Artaic growing more intense, Acworth has had to drop a sideline as a UFO investigator. To take up some of the slack, he's doing a little work on the side as a ghost hunter.

Acworth got the job as host of the History Channel's UFO Hunters program during the summer of 2007 while working with startups at MIT. When an e-mail went up on an MIT mailing list looking for a scientist with pilot and SCUBA credentials, he decided to apply. Acworth doesn't believe in UFOs per se, but he had earned his flying license as an amateur pilot in California and learned SCUBA diving as a 22-year-old backpacking through Australia. Although the UFO-spotting has wound down, he's got the makings of a career in the paranormal. The 41-year-old entrepreneur is now moonlighting as a ghost hunter, devising tests to detect or debunk paranormal activity on the Discovery Channel's Ghost Lab program.

All this after helping design a space-based telescope built to test one of Einstein's theories of relativity.

“I love research and development and cutting-edge innovation, and working with super-smart people,” he said.

Artaic is Acworth's second startup. In 2003, he helped found MIT spinoff Brontes Technology with MIT professor Douglas Hart, Eric Paley, who later started the venture capital firm Founder Collective, and Micah Rosenbloom, a Harvard Business School alum with Paley. The 3-D machine vision company sold three years later for \$95 million to 3M Corp.

Acworth was there at the founding but didn't stick around to manage the company. Instead, he joined the Cambridge-MIT Institute, helping startups spin out of the university.

“It was like being a VC, but my measure of success wasn't dollars returned, it was how many researchers are becoming entrepreneurs,” he said.

While Acworth was there, the institute worked with OrthoMimetics Ltd., e-stack Ltd. and Fibrecore Developments Ltd., he said.

Acworth signed on at Brontes after working at Stanford University on a test to calibrate instruments on Gravity Probe B. The \$700 million orbiting telescope was designed to test

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Einstein’s general theory of relativity, by using a star as a point of reference to determine how the mass of Earth distorts space-time. He was on a team of researchers that developed a calibration system to ensure against a repeat of calibration errors in the Hubble Space Telescope that cost NASA \$629 million to repair.

His new job as CEO and founder of Artaic isn’t anywhere near the technological cutting edge he explored in that effort, or in the founding days at Brontes, Acworth admits. He’s developed software that can turn a computer image into a mosaic pattern, and a robotic arm that picks out glass tiles and lays them down 10 times faster than human workers can. Artaic holds two provisional patents, but the company is more a business venture than it is art or science, he said.

“To go cash-flow positive in three years with a minimal investment, selling a product to an industry that’s one of the most depressed in the economy — I thought, ‘This is something I can do,’ ” he said.

Bootstrapped Artaic has taken friends-and-family investment “in the hundreds of thousands,” plus a \$50,000 loan from a small-business program through the city. Children’s Hospital Boston and St. Elizabeth’s Medical Center have both installed mosaic work from the fledgling company, and Acworth hopes Artaic will be profitable by some time in 2010.

Acworth admits it hasn’t been easy going. He took the UFO Hunters gig because he needed cash flow while Artaic was a PowerPoint deck.

Earlier this month, his UFO-spotting time investment paid off in another way. Acworth was one of few not to be swept away by the news of a Colorado boy thought to be caught up in a storm-chasing flying machine fashioned after a hot-air balloon.

The shape and the loft of the balloon gave cause for skepticism, he said. “I didn’t believe the kid could be on board.”

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