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Buffalo startup wants to use tech to save firefighter lives



FLARE is the product package sold by 3AM Innovations, a Buffalo-based startup that seeks to improve safety for firefighters.

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3AM Innovations is developing a system that helps fire departments track personnel during emergency situations, replacing the decidedly old-fashioned way most departments operate.

Company executives say 3AM is halfway through a \$500,000 seed raise and expects to begin production – using domestic factories – by late 2017.

The company was founded by Patrick O'Connor, now 32, in 2014 based on his experience with the Grand Island volunteer fire department. Most departments have a single accountability officer listening to radio updates and mapping out where firefighters are in a facility.

"You're supposed to give an update every five minutes," he said. "If you don't do that, they don't know where you are."

O'Connor began working with Launch

NY in late 2015 and was subsequently accepted into the Z80 Labs technology incubator. He got his big break in October when he was introduced to the team at The InVentures Group on the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus.

Working with that group, the company is developing a package that includes small hardware units for each person that enters a fire. Those units will be installed with software that reports their exact location and a number of potentially troublesome factors, such as someone who hasn't moved for 30 seconds or fast-rising temperatures. Those units are monitored via a tablet that is also sold as part of the package.

The rest of the year will involve finishing development work (a patent was filed in January), doing beta tests with local departments and building the potential sales pipeline when the product is fully commercialized. A Series A financing round is also projected for late 2017.

Company principals said the first

market is public fire departments, which often fund equipment purchases with state and federal grants. 3AM plans to help write those grants – and will offer a dual-pronged sales approach that involves a pure software-as-a-service approach or a direct-sale model with five years of service built in.

"In the end, the system is one-quarter the cost of a walkie-talkie and we're saving lives," said Robert Samuels, chief technology officer. "You look at the price point in that context and it just changes the world."

O'Connor said the company plans to pursue careful growth, with a goal of about 60 employees within five years. He said he views the company through the prism of social entrepreneurship and, as such, plans to donate 5 percent of the 3AM's net proceeds to the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation.

"It shows that we're really here to help firefighters," O'Connor said. "This company isn't just a money grab."

O'Connor's team now has several people with connections to InVentures, including Samuels; John Koelmel, who works closely with InVentures Group and is an investor/senior advisor in 3AM; and InVentures CEO Keith Blakely as an investor/senior advisor.

Thomas Dalfonso, CEO of Elma-based IT firm VITEC Solutions, is the company's chief financial officer.

Other company advisors include Jack Greco, a finance expert who works with various local startups; Steve Nicosia, the company's Launch NY mentor; Tom Merrill, a fire commissioner for the Snyder Fire District; and Matt Osinski, a Buffalo firefighter and chief of Grand Island's volunteer department.

3AM is the fourth Western New York startup company to publicly acknowledge growth-oriented financing in 2017, including LenderLogix (\$260,000), Buffalo Automation Group (\$50,000) and Accutheranostics (\$50,000).