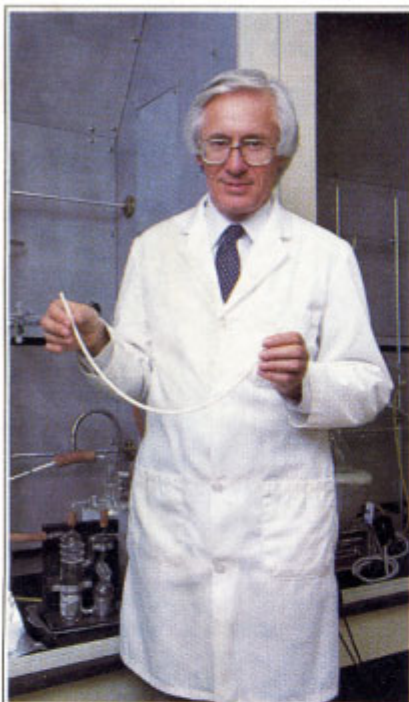


PEOPLE & INNOVATIONS



Dennis Poth

Donald J. Lyman, president of Vascular International, has designed a plastic vein that can be used in coronary-bypass operations.

TWO VEIN ATTEMPTS THAT SUCCEEDED

Transplanting a vein from a leg is one of the critical steps in coronary-bypass operations, but thousands of people don't have a healthy vein available. Now two young companies are close to offering the solution, in two radically different forms. One is biologically compatible plastics and the other is treated animal veins—

providing new options for patients who suffer from circulatory diseases.

Donald J. Lyman, president of Vascular International Inc., spent a decade designing and testing materials for use in small-diameter blood vessels. By manipulating the molecules of various polymers, Lyman eventually produced a vessel one millimeter in diameter, about half the width of the lead in a No. 2 pencil. More importantly, Lyman's plastic vein appears to solve a longstanding problem: the tendency of artificial vessels to clog. Last year, Lyman licensed the technology from the University of Utah, where he is a bioengineering professor, for \$148,000. He then started his company, raising \$329,000 from stock offerings.

Vascular International is beginning human tests of the blood vessel—but not soon enough for Lyman. "One of my friends at Stanford [University] hoped to be one of our first guinea pigs," he says. "But he didn't live long enough."

Xenotech Laboratories Inc. takes a quite different approach. "It turns out that nature is the best designer," says Charles Martin, chairman of Xenotech Laboratories, of Irvine, Calif. The company treats animal vessels with chemicals that preserve the tissue and thus inhibit the body from biologically rejecting it.

The four-year-old company anticipates beginning human tests within the next year, and Martin says animal studies indicate the vessels will work at diameters as small as four millimeters. Further along in development are ligaments, tendons, and heart valves from animal tissue—suggesting that the future bionic person may be part human, part pig.—Virginia Inman

DOLLS AND GUISE

Kids who got Cabbage Patch dolls last Christmas have something new to ask Santa for this year. Alper Richman Furs Ltd., a retailer based in Chicago, is selling hundreds of pint-size fur coats to dotting grandmas and indulgent parents who want their child's favorite rag doll to be the best-dressed toy on the block. The \$50 rabbit coat is most popular, but the store also sells more expensive minifurs, including a \$1,000 chinchilla number. The coats have been such hot sellers that the store has nixed plans to sell only traditional lines come cold weather. If orders for full-size coats put the store behind in filling those for the miniatures, co-owner Buddy Alper says he will just start a waiting list for would-be doll dressers. After all, Cabbage Patch doll buyers are used to waiting in line. —V.I.



Janice Martin

Its fur coats for Cabbage Patch dolls are so successful that Alper Richman Furs has nixed plans to sell only full-size coats this winter.

THE SILICON SALOONKEEPER

He won't water down your drink or yawn if you tell him your troubles. And he never needs tipping.

Scarab is a robot bartender, although "he" looks more like a cabinet wall unit than the anthropomorphic C3PO of *Star Wars* fame. The machine, built by Scarab Robotics Corp. of San Francisco, has a robot arm that swings a glass into place as liquor squirts from the right combination of 36 hidden bottles.

At the push of a computer key or the sound of a familiar voice, Scarab can make any one of hundreds of drinks. If



R. K. Meyer, creator of Scarab, a robot bartender, says his invention isn't intended to replace human bartenders, just help them out.

your usual is scotch and water, you can program the machine to mix that drink when it hears your name. You can also program it to know that J&B is a brand of scotch and that J&B and Dewar's are different.

Scarab has its limitations. Even at \$65,000—with all the extras—it still can't perform all the tricks of a \$30 blender. It can stir your martini, but if you want it shaken—James Bond's favorite—the robot will just stare at you dumbfounded. (The company says it is working on a blender attachment.)

Nonetheless, Scarab Robotics figures it can sell about 750 of the robots within the next five years to bars, restaurants,

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casinos, and well-heeled consumers. The robot could take the place of several assistant bartenders, the makers say. Since the machine is voice-activated, waitresses could call in orders on lightweight head-



Scarab's robot arm can swing a glass into place and mix any one of hundreds of drinks.

sets, and Scarab would have the drinks waiting for them.

R. K. Meyer, Scarab's creator and president of Scarab Robotics, is quick to note that the robot isn't intended to replace bartenders, just to serve as their helpers. After all, some customers are bound to want piña coladas or plain conversation,

neither of which Scarab is able to provide.

Still, robotic competition is bound to raise some hackles. "We're always interested in anything that can save us money, but not at the cost of offending our customers or the unions," says Phil Wechsler, director of public relations for Resorts International Casino Hotel in Atlantic City, N.J.

—V.J.

ARE TWO HEADS BETTER THAN ONE?

James M. Bowie thinks you should throw out your old toothbrush—and buy one of his newfangled ones.

Bowie's company is the U.S. licensee for Action 2, a two-headed, Y-shaped monster of a toothbrush that cleans both sides of the teeth at the same time and supposedly reaches places that rarely feel a toothbrush. To use it, you slide your teeth between the two facing banks of bristles and scrub back and forth.

Bowie calls the Action 2 "the most significant development in hygiene since dental floss," and he expects to clean up with it, predicting that half the people in the United States will be using a two-headed brush within five years. Not everyone is quite so enthusiastic.

"It's just another gimmick," says Harry Bohannon, research professor in the University of North Carolina's dental ecology department. It is not the first dual-headed brush, he says. The first one was intro-



Berry Shapiro

Distributor James M. Bowie calls Action 2, a two-headed toothbrush, "the most significant development in hygiene since dental floss."

duced at least 30 years ago. Moreover, Bohannon complains, it is cumbersome. After trying it, he says he "can't believe anybody would use it for very long."

The forked toothbrush has found its