



## Kurt Klitzke

Outstanding Achievement/Innovation  
in Biopharmaceuticals

**MANY BUSINESSES GET STARTED** in a spare room or basement, but Kurt Klitzke kicked his entrepreneurship to a different level when he decided to create a research lab in the garage. He says, “You work where you have to, right?”

He began studying the creation of human tissue in 1991, focusing on traditional transplant recovery processes. Within only four years, the climate began to change as biotechnology and medical device companies began using tissue for different applications. The shift was exciting, Klitzke recalls, because it opened up more possibilities in the world of regenerative medicine.

In 2001, he developed a product made out of human tissue that could be used in urology procedures, and two years later, he tweaked the product so it used porcine tissue. At about the same time, he worked on a program focused on kidney recovery, helping to reduce the incidence of blood clots in the organs.

Burns were another big interest area for Klitzke, who enjoyed the challenge of modifying tissue without changing its characteristics. “Really, you’re prompting the body to heal itself,” he says. “To get to the place where that happens, and where regeneration of tissue can occur, is incredibly exciting.”





CLOSER  
LOOK

## AIRMED BIOLOGICS

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As a pioneer in the field, Klitzke has served in executive roles with human tissue banks for the American Red Cross, RTI Biologics and CryoLife. He’s experienced the evolution of biologics from human transplant, xenograft, transgenic and cellular therapies, and has developed physician training programs that have delivered instruction to thousands of doctors.

In 2010, he founded Airmed Biologics (see sidebar), a firm that works with academic institutions and healthcare organizations, and mainly focuses on research, development and commercialization of proprietary regenerative medicine products.

“I’m still in awe over the work that’s being done and what’s being developed,” he says. “It’s amazing to be part of this field.”

**SOMETIMES, THE SCIENCE OF HEALTHCARE** can seem a bit mystical in its ability to innovate and heal. So, it’s no surprise that Airmed Biologics would derive its name from Airmid, the Celtic goddess of regeneration.

Founded in 2010 by Kurt Klitzke, the Stillwater-based company specializes in regenerative technologies for a wide array of medical applications. In other words, it works with human and porcine tissue, creating ways to add tissue to damaged areas so the body can heal itself. The breadth of applications includes cardiac surgery, wound care, plastic surgery, even hernia repair and spinal care.

Airmed is actually a rebrand of a company, InnovaGraft Biologics, that started in 2007. That firm ran into problems when its main funding source, a global real estate cartel, was seized by European banks. That’s when Klitzke realized it would be far better to take the intellectual capital and aim toward reinvention.

With just eight employees, Airmed shows impressive prospects for growth. Currently, the firm is looking at a number of technology transfer opportunities that will give the company a chance to expand the business, increase capital and do more research and development. “We’re excited to create a revenue stream that allows us

to do research without constantly looking for money,” Klitzke says.

The company has technology for at least 120 clinical applications in 16 different surgical specialties, so there’s no worry that it can’t meet market needs. Also, an animal health group just got created and Klitzke is contemplating another rebrand for that aspect of the business.

“We could be doing more, and we will be,” he says. “The important thing is that we’re having fun every day, so it’s not a big deal if you have to work 14 hours in one day.”

There are challenges, he adds, but the team is cohesive and operates well as a virtual office. Airmed talks with clients via online collaboration tools, and keeps its documents in “the cloud,” so it can go paperless. That frugality funnels more funds into deeper research, Klitzke notes.

Best of all, the medical and healthcare community in Minnesota is so strong that Airmed would never consider operating anywhere else. “I can’t tell you how many leads we’ve gotten for vendors, potential clients, even law firms and other resources,” he says. “There are strong trade organizations, and so we have great support in that area. We really are in the best place for doing business right now.”