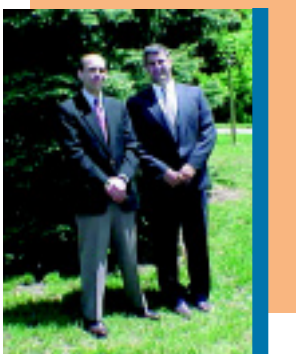
KensaGroup Advances University-Based Technologies

Since first arriving on campus in 1974, Bruce Ganem, Franz and Elisabeth Roessler Professor of Chemistry, has been interested in economic development and technology transfer. "Coming from Stanford, I was surprised at how few inventions resulting from university research had been commercialized," he notes. Now, Ganem and cofounder Tony Eisenhut, Cornell '88, are trying to do something about it. They have founded KensaGroup, LLC, an intellectual property development business dedicated to the commercialization of promising university-based discoveries in the fields of chemistry, biochemistry, chemical engineering, and computational modeling.

At the core of KensaGroup is an elite group of scientific advisors that evaluates new technologies, often finding unanticipated and commercially viable applications. For example, one technology proposed for sterilizing biodegradable polymers is being developed for cardiac stents and other biomedical devices. A spermicide proposed for low-cost birth control may find a much larger market as an antimic robial agent.

Ganem and Eisenhut first met two years ago through the Cornell Research Foundation (CRF), when Eisenhut, a successful executive with Aldi, decided to return to Ithaca with his family. "I contacted the Cornell Research Foundation in search of new entrepreneurial opportunities," says Eisenhut. "I had two initial criteria. First, I was looking for a technology that addressed a pending regulatory issue; second, I had hoped to find an inventor with an international reputation who was interested in being involved in the start-up." With the help of CRF's Richard Cahoon, Eisenhut and Ganem started a company based on a technology from Ganem's laboratory. As the two entrepreneurs discovered a common interest in technology development, they folded their first start-up into KensaGroup, whose mission is to commercialize emerging technologies on university campuses.

Although headquartered in Ithaca, New York, the company casts a wide net in search of exciting inventions. "We've established contacts at quite a number of U.S. research universities," says Eisenhut, who is President and CEO. "Most tech transfer offices are thrilled that we're interested in meeting with them, since early-stage inventions are often quite difficult to license. Much of what we do involves building relationships based on trust and mutual understanding." Thus far, KensaGroup has launched two start-up companies, one in Ithaca and one in Boston. The firm recently reached an agreement with Virginia Tech to evaluate all new technologies at VT in the areas of chemistry and biochemistry.



Beth Ganem

Bruce Ganem (l.) and Tony Eisenhut (r.)

For Ganem, who is Chief Scientific Officer and chair of KensaGroup's Scientific Advisory Board, the thrill of exploring new inventions and of helping young entrepreneurs is especially satisfying. "I've enjoyed being part of Cornell's Entrepreneurship and Personal Enterprise Program, especially teaching courses in my department and in the Johnson School about science-based start-up companies. Being part of KensaGroup with Tony, however, has added a new dimension to the entrepreneurial experience." Juggling his academic and research interests with a busy start-up venture takes some planning, Ganem notes. In addition to serving as department chair, he continues to teach and run his research laboratory, and he is executive editor for *Tetrahedron Letters*, a weekly international organic chemistry journal.

Tony Eisenhut
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