



Jim Davis / Arizona Daily Star

Tom Grogan built Ventana Medical Systems after being told by a UA lawyer that the move was illegal.

2 UA professors get cash awards

One-time 'felon' launched a local successful firm

By David Wichner
ARIZONA DAILY STAR

As a University of Arizona pathology professor nearly 20 years ago, Dr. Tom Grogan was told he was a felon after filing for a business license to launch his idea for an automated slide-staining device.

Today, Grogan's company, Ventana Medical Systems Inc., employs about 700 people and expects \$160 million in revenues, and Grogan is honored as one of the fathers of the Tucson biotechnology industry.

On Wednesday, Grogan and

UA management information systems professor Hsinchun Chen were honored by the UA with the inaugural Technology Innovation Awards at a ceremony at the UA Student Union Memorial Center. The awards, which come with a \$10,000 cash prize, recognize UA faculty members who have excelled in moving technology out of the laboratory and into the marketplace. They are to be given annually.

Advanced computer-database technology that Chen developed in 1998 as head of the UA's Artificial Intelligence Lab was spun off into Knowledge Computing Corp. The company has developed a suite of criminal database tools used by the Tucson

Police Department and law enforcement agencies in more than 100 communities across the United States.

The awards are intended to encourage entrepreneurship among the UA faculty as part of a larger effort to improve the transfer of cutting-edge technologies from the university to commercial markets, Richard Powell, UA vice president for re-

search and graduate studies, told a crowd of about 140 attendees at the award event.

Commercializing technology is among the missions of federal land-grant universities such as the UA and gives students a



Hsinchun Chen

SEE AWARDS / D5

AWARDS

Chen developed Coplink police database tools

Continued from Page D1

chance to work on real-world problems, Powell said. "It's not enough to just discover things; we have to do something with those discoveries," Powell said.

Chen, whose development of

the Coplink police database tools was funded by the National Institute of Justice and the National Science Foundation, said commercialization takes the benefits of new technology beyond campus to benefit society as a whole.

"This is a very positive thing to do, to encourage faculty to be brave and embarking on something that can make a substantive impact not only on the university but on the local community and nationally as well," Chen said.

He is currently working on a terrorist database and methods

of "mining" biological data to better understand cancer.

Grogan said the climate for faculty entrepreneurship is much different from when he started Ventana in 1985 — and promptly got a letter from a UA lawyer who informed him that he may be a felon for breaking a law barring state employ-



Tom Grogan

ees from taking stakes in private companies. The law was quickly changed at the request of UA administrators.

The Technology Innovation Awards represent a welcome about-face from such attitudes, Grogan said.

"It's a wonderful addition of enthusiasm — it's saying one of our cultural values is that our academic ideas have influence beyond the walls of the university, and it's encouraging that," Grogan said. "I come from the era when that wasn't necessarily so."