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Joe Bagan, CEO of Sharklet Technologies, poses at the Sid Martin Biotechnology Incubator in Alachua on Thursday.

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By ANTHONY CLARK

Sun business editor

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When the U.S. Navy sought an environmentally friendly way to keep algae and barnacles off its ships, University of Florida materials scientist Anthony Brennan came up with a coating inspired by the pattern on shark skin.

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JOE BAGAN

42, CEO, Sharklet Technologies LLC PERSONAL: Married 15 years, three children, ages 13, 11 and 8

DREAM PARTNER FOR LUNCH: Abraham Lincoln

BEST ADVICE RECEIVED: "Never own anything that eats while you're sleeping."

FAVORITE BOOK: "The Greatest Game Ever Played"

FAVORITE MOVIE: "Donnie Brasco" with Al Pacino

FAVORITE CD: Ramsey Lewis' "Between the Keys"

HOBBIES: Woodworking and golf

When a colleague noted that the marine microorganisms it repelled were the same size as the staphylococcus A virus, Brennan discovered the coating is 3 to 5 times more effective than standard methods at keeping staph from growing on medical devices.

His two-for-one solution, a microscopic pattern on a silicone elastomer, comes at a time when the marine industry is moving toward a global ban on biocides and paints that pollute waterways and kill marine life.

It also comes at a time when hospitals are faced with drug-resistant staph infections that patients are catching in hospitals and Medicare has stopped paying to treat.

Considering the market potential, Brennan had little trouble recruiting experienced business leaders to form a company around his invention.

The company is Sharklet Technologies LLC and its CEO is Joe Bagan, who brings an impressive resume.

Bagan's career started in finance and accounting. He spent 12 years with Arthur Andersen, where he made partner and ran consulting for communications and high-tech clients. He went to work for AT&T Broadband to lead its information technology organization, then became chief financial officer of a Denver wireless firm.

After that, he ran Adelphia's seven-state Southeast region, emphasizing he was part of the "rescue team" after the company declared bankruptcy during the Rigas family criminal proceedings. For that job, he was stationed in West Palm Beach.

"I loved Florida, except for Jeanne, Frances, Wilma, Ivan, Rita and Katrina," he said. Each hurricane knocked out a huge chunk of Adelphia's service area and Wilma did \$65,000 in damage to his house.

After Adelphia's sale to Time Warner and Comcast, Bagan went back to Denver to lead a couple of struggling startups.

He was looking for his next venture when a mutual friend put Brennan in touch with him. That was in May. By August, they launched Sharklet Technologies.

Bagan still lives in Denver, but plans to move here.

To be chief marketing officer for Sharklet, he recruited a friend from West Palm Beach, Christopher Malter, an experienced health care and telecommunications consultant and chairman of Gov. Crist's new Florida Life Sciences Council. The other employee is Ken Chung, a UF materials science master's graduate.

The company is part of the incubator program at the Sid Martin Biotechnology Incubator in Alachua. Bagan said they expect to have 10 employees by the end of next year.

"Over the next six months to a year, it will be all about how do we manufacture, in what materials and how do we do this on a cost-efficient, high-volume run basis," Bagan said.

The company is already well-funded, he said, with \$1 million in private investments and more unsolicited offers for funding.

"That speaks to the fact that there are problems out there seeking environmentally friendly, green

answers," he said. "This is a green answer to some serious problems."

The problem for boats is that within about 18 months, an untreated hull will carry 25-30 percent more weight from microorganism growth, reducing speed and turning radius while increasing fuel use.

When seeking an environmentally friendly solution, Brennan noticed that slow-moving marine life like whales were covered in microorganisms, while faster creatures like dolphins were clean. The exception was sharks, which usually move slow, but are clean.

He put shark skin under a microscope and noticed a pattern.

Brennan's Sharklet pattern is actually an improvement on shark skin, Bagan said. It consists of microscopic bars arranged in a height, width, length and distance that microorganisms do not find hospitable.

In a test, staph A cultures took 21 days to form a biofilm colony. The standard for medical devices is 4 to 7 days.

Marine coating is a \$3 billion to \$4 billion industry, Bagan said. For the medical applications, catheters alone are a \$13 billion industry.

"With prosthetic implants and other devices, you're expanding the market by billions," he said.

The company is seeking a partner to handle manufacturing. Bagan figures Sharklet will eventually be split and sold to a medical device company and a marine coating company.

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