

Schenectady motorcycle helmet startup raises \$1 million



PHOTOGRAPHER: LARR RULISON

Kirsh Helmets CEO and inventor Jason Kirshon, left, with president and chief operating officer Don DeVito.

By Larry Rulison

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A Schenectady-based startup company that is making a new type of motorcycle helmet recently closed on a \$1 million round of seed money.

The company, Kirsh Helmets, is based at the New York BizLab in Schenectady, a business incubator located on State Street owned by Transfinder CEO Antonio Civitella.

Square Peg Ventures, an early stage investment fund of The Wagoner Firm, an Albany law firm, was one of the investors in the \$1 million round. Names of the other investors were not disclosed.

The helmet, which uses a special liquid-gel liner instead of styrofoam, is smaller than current half-shell motorcycle helmets - and safer, says inventor Jason Kirshon, who is also chairman and CEO.

“With this first round of funding, and the support of our local startup community, we’re ready to take to the streets, and deliver the best riding experience possible,” Kirshon said.

The various components of the helmet are made by suppliers and then assembled in Hudson in Columbia County by workers at Coarc Manufacturing, the nonprofit

manufacturing subsidiary of Coarc, which works with people with disabilities.

The Wagoner Firm represents Kirsh as well and is one of the in-house advisers to BizLab tenants.

“We are firm believers that early stage investors need to bring more to the table than just money,” said Matthew Wagoner, managing partner of The Wagoner Firm.

Although Kirsh helmets are not widely available now in retail stores, the company is working on distribution agreements and is preparing to launch at several large motorcycle events this year. The helmet will cost in the range of several hundred dollars, but is the smallest and safest half-shell model, Kirshon says.

Kirshon says the company will target the half-shell market as well as the half shell “novelty” helmet market. So-called novelty helmets are often more stylish and look like real helmets but provide no protection from crashes. Motorcycle riders often wear them, Kirshon said, to appear to be complying with helmet laws. Those novelty helmets can be much cheaper, but Kirshon argues that riders spend tens of thousands on their bikes and will be willing to spend hundreds on a safer helmet that is also good looking.



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