

# LighTopTech co-founder talks challenges and successes

Jinelle Shengulette 11:58 a.m. EDT March 13, 2015



(Photo: Provided photo)

While hard at work on her doctorate in optics, Cristina Canavesi also found time to start an optical technology company.

She and University of Rochester advisor/mentor Jannick Rolland founded LighTopTech in May 2013, introducing their product, Explorer4D™.

The technology captures 2-D and 3-D images of a variety of materials, including cells beneath the surface of the skin, noninvasively.

Since both women come from academic and research backgrounds, starting a business came with a fresh set of challenges.

"Entrepreneurship was a new thing for me. So switching from thinking about the technology to now thinking in terms of business and market opportunities has been the biggest challenge.

It's been really interesting to have this shift in mentality," says Canavesi, a native of Milano, Italy.

The 33-year-old is currently working on her master's in business at Simon School, and the duo has sought the advice of mentors at High Tech Rochester, where their company is currently operating.

We spoke with Canavesi, a Henrietta resident, recently about a grant she received last year, what the next step is in developing the company and product, and more.

**So far, we've developed:** A prototype at UR that's being used for research. The next step is advancing the engineering of the product so it can become easily transportable for on-site testing. Right now it fits on a computer cart, but it's not optimized for being moved around. We want to improve the robustness and the repeatability of the instrument.

**We received a \$225,000 grant:** From the National Science Foundation last year. That grant was really important to us to demonstrate the feasibility of using the Explorer4D™ in the manufacturing environment. What we developed with the grant is a new scanner system that has significantly improved the performance of our imaging. Also, it drastically reduced the size of the scanner, so that helps us prove the robustness of the scanning.

**Our short-term goal:** Is to complete the development of the portable instrument so it can be tested onsite. And the long-term for us is bringing the instrument to the medical community. When these goals will happen all depends on the funding. Our current timeline is to have a first system for outside testing by the end of the year.

**Engineering is a male-dominated field:** And there aren't as many women role models to look up to. I founded the Women in Engineering group in 2009 at UR. ... I wanted to create a forum where we could meet successful engineers that could tell us about their career experience. I think having this type of a forum for women students to learn about how women can be successful in this field is very important as an opportunity for networking and seeking mentorship.

**The optics community:** In Rochester is fantastic. That was a big reason I came to Rochester in 2007 for grad school and also the top reason we started our company here. There's a really fantastic environment for optics. There are many small-medium businesses that have really cutting-edge technology for optics.

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