

DENISTRY

Startup Aims to Make Braces Invisible

by [Barbara Miracle](#)



“We believe that this is the next product that is going to change orthodontics.”

— BioMers CEO Randall Wall

[Photo: Jason P. Smith]

The process of teeth-straightening isn't fun for anyone. But a Naples startup company is working to make wearers feel less self-conscious with a new generation of braces and retainers that have nearly invisible wires.

Ceramic brace brackets that blend in with the teeth have been around since the late 1980s, but until recently the connecting wire, called an arch wire, continued to be a metal eyesore. BioMers Products now offers a glass and polymer composite wire that almost disappears in the mouth but is strong enough to straighten teeth. “We believe that this is the next product that is going to change orthodontics,” says BioMers CEO Randall Wall, who came out of retirement to launch the company. Wall introduced the first ceramic orthodontic bracket to the dental community when he was president of Unitek, then a subsidiary of Bristol-Myers Squibb.

The arch wire and retainer wire products, which BioMers began selling last year, use a patent-pending fabrication process invented by two researchers at the National University of Singapore. BioMers licensed the technology and began conducting clinical trials during 2006-07 at Jacksonville University's School of Orthodontics.

Wall says that about 60 labs worldwide sell BioMers' retainer wires and about 30 companies sell the arch wires. In addition to the U.S. and Europe, Wall says he's focusing on the huge aesthetic orthodontics market in Asia.

Wall says the product's cost adds only about \$50 to \$60 to a patient's expenses. The company expects sales of \$7 million this year.

Next up for BioMers will be a host of new products, including colored retainer wires and arch wires for the teen-age market. (Teen-agers want different colored retainers to match their outfits — or their iPods.) Early this year the company is introducing a "crystal clear bracket" to complement its translucent wires. "We will have the complete aesthetic solution," says Wall. The company also is looking at offering custom orthodontics that use a computer reading of a patient's mouth to develop a beginning-to-end system of prebent wires, making it easier for the orthodontist.

Wall has funded the company so far with \$1.6 million from 25 friends and family shareholders. This month he is hoping to raise \$2 million to \$3 million from investors at the Florida Venture Capital Conference, where he is a presenter. Wall says, "We feel that now is the time to take the next step to look at venture capital."

Innovation Notes

» Alachua-based Sharklet Technologies [["Sharkskin Suite,"](#) October 2008] was named the winner of the Southeastern Bio Investor Forum's Early-Stage Shootout. Four companies selected by an advisory panel presented their technologies at the December conference in Palm Beach. The event is the premier life sciences venture capital forum in the Southeast.

» Four Floridians were among TechJournal South magazine's 25 most influential people in the Southeast technology community. Floridians named were Randy Berridge, president of the Florida High Tech Corridor Council in Heathrow; Aaron Davidson, managing partner at H.I.G. Ventures in Miami; Kenneth Ford, founder and director of the Florida Institute for Human & Machine Cognition in Pensacola; and Sue Washer, president and CEO of Applied Genetic Technologies Corp. in Alachua.