



2020 NEAL SMITH ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR

Dr. Martin Gross – President & Co-Founder



Gross-Wen Technologies uses its patented wastewater treatment technology, known as the revolving algal biofilm system (RAB), to cost-effectively recover nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus from wastewater. Compared to other treatment options, their system is significantly more affordable and produces algae biomass which can be sold as a slow release algal fertilizer or bioplastic. Gross-Wen Technologies exists to help municipalities and industrial clients sustainably treat water in a more effective and affordable way. Their technology was developed at Iowa State University, and from there, they've grown into a trusted source for environmentally friendly wastewater treatment.

Dr. Martin Gross grew up in an entrepreneurial family. His father owned and operated several businesses. Dr. Gross didn't realize at the time that entrepreneurship was in his blood. He enrolled at Iowa State University, with plans on obtaining a PhD in engineering with a goal to become a faculty member. As a graduate student, Dr. Gross and his major professor Dr. Zhiyou Wen, invented a sustainable water treatment system that utilizes algae to remove pollutants in waste water. Together they founded Gross-Wen Technologies in 2014.

Over the next several years, they were awarded three USDA SBIR grants, which allowed them to further develop and validate the commercial use of their technology. They currently have demonstration projects with the City of Chicago, City of Creston and the City of Slater. They believe their technology can change lives, especially in rural communities. "Our technology focuses on helping rural Iowa communities meet the new, more stringent, water standards at a fraction of the cost," said Dr. Gross. Their ultimate goal is to become the #1 algae-based wastewater treatment system in the United States.

To help cement the foundations of their business, Dr. Gross reached out to Ted Bair of the ISU SBDC, to learn how to best grow his business. Dr. Gross said, "The ISU SBDC helped us save time while helping to push things along and make everything go much smoother. Instead of zigzagging through, we had a straight path and the SBDC helped us stay focused and get everything done. I would encourage any new startup to sit down with the business advisors at the SBDC. The startup ecosystem in Iowa and particularly Iowa State University is outstanding. The most surprising part of starting my own business was the amount of support we received in Ames from the ISU SBDC, ISU Startup Factory, Ag Startup Engine, Pappajohn Center among others."

With the help of the ISU SBDC, Gross-Wen has secured \$6.4 million through both grant, debt and equity financing. They are currently in a \$5 million series A investment round. They have also created 12 full-time and 4 part-time jobs, with plans for additional hiring in the near future.

