

Eovations president: Bay City and region had the investors and talent for new company

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Michael Wayland | The Bay City Times



BAY CITY — Claude Brown Jr. sits in his company's new boardroom in Bay City and jokes that maybe he shouldn't say where he graduated from college, since he is working in Michigan now. "It's Oho State, so we may not want to go into that," he says.

The new company, which is leasing and renovating a 77,000-square-foot building at 1645 Marquette in the Marquette Industrial Center formerly occupied by Thomson Bay Co., is developing a composite building material called EoTek, a type of synthetic wood that looks and feels like real wood, but is more durable and does not degrade under weathering.

Brown is a former research and development director for Dow who, along with a small group of investors — some from the Great Lakes Bay Region — purchased the technology and set up Eovations this past summer.

Brown took time to answer some questions for The Bay City Times about the company, its products and the future.



Claude Brown Jr.

Q: What is the product that Eovations will be developing?

A: "The simplest way to describe it is it's synthetic wood, that's not a far but glamorous way, but it's an accurate description ... "You take a board or plank made with the EoTek technology and split it open, it is hard to distinguish that from looking at split oak. So, we literally have duplicated the structure of wood on the inside."

Q: What are the advantages to the EoTek compared to wood?

A: "Wood has a couple of let's say good points, which keeps wood and building construction fairly inexpensive, and it's a very flexible building material. Where wood has disadvantages is in the outside applications where it is subject to weathering, freeze fall, just the elements. Because the EoTek products are made from polymers and (minerals) there is nothing in there that degrades. "So, what we can do is duplicate the internal properties of wood — that's the properties, the strengths, the structural elements — but were using molecules, if you will, or chemistry that is very durable outside.

"Very simply said, do I ever imagine EoTek two by fours replacing studs in walls? "No. Wood will probably always be the better cost option; that's a protective option not open to the weather. But do I imagine EoTek BASED lumber — to use the term loosely — being used for outside pavilions, where it is exposed to such weather and water and all sorts of things? "Absolutely."

Q: What are you currently doing with this facility?

A: "We're just moving in, as you can see from all the activity."

"But the facility will have a couple purposes. It's primary purpose will be R & D, but let me speak more specifically, it's more applied development."

"The EoTek technology that was purchased and spun off from Dow is pretty well bedded as a technology. We know it works, we know how to make it work, it has a good patent portfolio that we are constructing around it. But that's the technology, then the applications, basically, we take the technology and make specific shape and give it specific properties."

Q: How long has the company been around?

A: "The company was formed mid this summer. So, this is our first location."

"Some investors came together, we established a company and acquired the technology from Dow, but right now it's independent from Dow."

Q: Why did you pick Bay City and this facility?

A: "Obviously it's technology we brought out of Dow. Some of the key people are from around here and our investors are from Michigan. We did look at other locations because we do have a larger sub-investor base, but we ended back up here."

"It's a combination of resident talent and the building facility is actually tuned very nicely to our needs. The package the state put together for us, not only helped us financially, but we took that as a demonstration of the desire to fund some of these base industries and development."

"Kind of poetically said, it may be the return of lumber ... to this area because in some way we are lumber, but the molecules are different."

Q: What are your hopes for the future?

A: My aspirations for the business — and this will seem logical to you — invent as many applications as we can using the EoTek technology in a number of fields."

When we talk about lumber people naturally gravitate to — as they should — toward building construction, leasing application, infrastructure, transportation, potentially automotive, but that's a little bit farther off, and other sorts of things like that ...

"So, invent as many applications as possible, launch good ones to prove the viability of the company called Eovations using the EoTek technology."