

STARTUPS & INNOVATIONS

Compiled by Sherry Hsieh

New York Car Care Product Maker Makes OC Home

Irvine Location To Be West Coast HQ

Third time's a charm for **Automotive Care Laboratories LLC**.

The supplier of automotive consumer products announced the opening of an office in Irvine this month, its third. It will serve as the West Coast headquarters for the New York-based company.

Chief Executive **Atticus Firey** said the additional office at 92 Corporate Park will allow it to better serve its West Coast clients.



Firey: cut his teeth in car care with venerable Meguiar's, a 116-year-old manufacturer. Took OC headquarters for car culture, knowledge of talent.

Plus, it brings the executive back to his old stomping ground.

"I was born in Newport Beach, and I lived in Orange County all my life," Firey said.

Prior to joining Automotive Care, he served as chief operating officer of car care product company **Meguiar's Inc.** in Irvine for nearly 10 years.

He said the experience helped him choose OC over Los Angeles when deciding where to open up shop.

"Los Angeles may have made sense because of our brand, West Coast Customs, in

Burbank, but as we start to expand and grow our talent pool, it's easier [for me] to identify and recruit, being from OC," he said.

The company, founded in 2016, creates, manufactures and distributes products for brands such as Gas Monkey Garage, Top-Rev and West Coast Customs, the auto repair shop known for customizing vehicles on the MTV series "Pimp My Ride."

It also has an office in Hong Kong. It employs 75 across all three locations.

Firey said he plans to grow the Irvine office from 30 to 100 employees.

"We're coming to the West Coast to be closely associated with West Coast car culture."

—Subrina Hudson

Band Mates

Brothers **Sooj** and **Eddie Park** soft-launched **Orangewood Guitars** in November.

The Orange-based company imports acoustic, steel-stringed guitars to its specs that start under \$200. The ukulele is \$85.

The aim is "quality guitars at good prices," Sooj said.

Products "are designed by our team and checked when they arrive," said Eddie.

The brothers moved to the U.S. from Korea in 2004, grew up locally, are in their 20s, and attended the **University of Southern California**. While they are familiar with the trade—the family business imports instruments—the brothers are trying their hands at their first

solo venture.

Orangewood hews to the startup playbook: aimed at younger buyers, marketing via social media versus print ads, and talking up "disruption" of a stagnant industry.

Data from Statista show U.S. guitar sales cratered in the recession, clawed back to 2005 levels three years ago, and have stayed there—at \$1.2 billion a year.

"The industry needs a facelift," Eddie said. A new generation needs to "get their hands on instruments."

—Paul Hughes

Auto Loan

AutoGravity, an Irvine-based fintech providing auto financing through a smartphone, announced a partnership with **Audi Financial Services**, the financial services affiliate of Audi of America.

Users will be able to find their chosen Audi at the dealership of their choice and arrange financing, all in four easy steps, AutoGravity said. Car buyers are given up to four personalized financing, offers on the vehicle of their choice.

The announcement follows an alliance AutoGravity announced in September with **Hyundai Capital America**.

In July, AutoGravity received a \$30 million investment from **VW Credit Inc.**, enabling its software to power the Volkswagen Credit smartphone app to provide financing for Volkswagen buyers in the U.S. The company's

also received \$50 million in venture capital and lending commitments from units of **Daimler AG** in Germany.

—Peter J. Brennan

Eye Drugs

Alevca Ocular LLC in San Clemente licensed four technologies from **Case Western Reserve University** in Cleveland, Ohio, to develop ophthalmological drugs focused on treating eye infection and irritation.

"Our initial push will be on drugs targeting inflammation from cataract, LASIK and other eye surgeries, as well as from microbial causes," said Chief Executive **Chris Magill**.

Alevca attended the **J.P. Morgan Healthcare Conference** in San Francisco, held Jan. 8 to 11. It's seeking Series A funding.

"We aim to partner with big pharma to help accelerate programs and bring the drugs to market," Magill said.

Eric Pearlman, former professor and director of research at Case Western Reserve, developed the technologies and is now a professor and director of the institute of immunology at the **University of California-Irvine**.

—Sherry Hsieh



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U.S. VC-Backed Cos.

Charts show largest investments in venture capital-backed companies in the U.S. in Q4 2017, and the largest in Q3, Softbank's investment in WeWork (see related story, page 1). Two of the four investments in Q4 were in California cos. OC is among the 11 largest subregions for venture capital investments. In Q4 it ranked 10 of 11 in total deals (10) and 11 of 11 in amount raised (\$40M)—figures sharply lower than Q3 (19 deals, \$180M raised).

"Funding didn't come in as in past quarters—some is timing, to be honest," **Tim Rahall**, a partner in the Irvine office of **Ernst & Young**, said. "There's a lot of promising companies we're talking to."

Rahall sees more VC interest in OC in 2018. "VCs are looking at companies with truly differential technology—all industries ... even companies that are very consumer friendly that serve the need-it-now culture. Orange County has those young businesses."

TOP INVESTMENTS Q4

Investor	Focus	Target	Total Round
CapitalG, Fidelity Mgmt & Research Co., Ontario Teachers' Pension, Undisclosed	Transportation Services	Lyft, San Francisco	\$1.5B "Later"
Baillie Gifford & Co., China Asset Mgmt Co., CITIC Capital Holdings, Lone Pine Capital, Russia-China Investment Fund, Tencent Holdings Ltd.	Electric and self-driving cars	NextEV, San Jose	\$1.0B Series E (5th)
Fidelity Investments, IVP, SoftBank Vision Fund, Wellington Management Co.	Real Estate Services	Urban Compass, New York	\$550M Series F (6th)
Alibaba Group Holding Ltd., Fidelity, EDB Investments, Google Inc., Grupo Globo, Janus Henderson, JPMorgan Chase, T. Rowe Price, Temasek Hldgs	Augmented Reality Displays	Magic Leap, Dania Beach, Fla.	\$502M Series E (5th)

TOP INVESTMENT Q3

Investor	Focus	Target	Total Round
Softbank, Softbank Vision Fund	Comm'l real estate/business support services	WeWork Cos., New York	\$3.1B Series G (7th)

