

Kizoo to invest \$362M in ‘rejuvenation biotech’

By Cormac Sheridan

DUBLIN – Michael Greve, one of Germany’s most successful internet entrepreneurs and investors, is personally committing €300 million (US\$362 million) to building a portfolio of biotechnology firms focused on different aspects of aging.

His investment vehicle, Kizoo Technology Capital GmbH, of Karlsruhe, has already provided seed funding to more than a dozen early stage firms. Greve is now ready to invest in follow-on rounds, particularly in four core companies he described as “category openers” in rejuvenation biotech. “We are really super focused, because there are so many things we could do,” he told *BioWorld*.



Michael Greve, owner, Kizoo Technology Capital, and founder, The Forever Healthy Foundation

Combating the aging process is not just an organizing principle for the fund. Greve is a believer in the idea that healthy lifespans can be dramatically extended, both by synthesizing and applying current knowledge more systematically and by uncovering new biological insights into the root causes of aging, which will lead to new therapies. “Aging is not a singular process,” he said. “There’s a lot of things we don’t know – there are some things we do know.”

Its “lighthouse investments” include [Underdog Pharmaceuticals Inc.](#), of Mountain View, Calif., which is developing engineered cyclodextrins for removing arterial plaque by targeting 7-ketocholesterol, a cholesterol oxidation product considered to be a significant player in atherogenesis. The company is a spin-out from the not-for-profit Sens Research Foundation.

[Cellvie AG](#), of Matzingen, Switzerland, is taking forward research on therapeutic mitochondria transfer, a technique that co-founder James McCully originally developed at Harvard Medical School, in Boston. Its lead indication is reperfusion injury associated with kidney transplant.

Another key focus is Clemson, S.C.-based Elastrin Therapeutics Inc., which aims to reverse tissue calcification by using an antibody, formulated in an albumin nanoparticle for extended release, to selectively target and remove damaged elastin, a protein component of the extracellular matrix that imparts elasticity to tissues. San Francisco-based Revel Pharmaceuticals Inc., is developing enzymatic drugs to target cross-linked collagen fibers, which contribute to inflammation and fibrosis.

Those and the fund’s other biotech investments are all early stage ventures – Kizoo has so far invested about \$15 million in its biotechnology portfolio. As its gears up to commit larger amounts of capital to its most promising investees, it will seek out partners to co-invest, Greve said. Other portfolio firms are also seeking additional investment.

In the context of mainstream biotech – and mainstream biotech investing – Kizoo’s interests are distinctly leftfield. “It totally sounds like science fiction,” Greve agreed. “In the end, we have to deliver proof.” Portfolio firms, moreover, will not get a free ride. “They have to deliver like any other company,” he said. “That’s why we’re so open to syndication, because that gives us a reality check.”

Greve is by no means the first German entrepreneur to train his attention on and allocate his resources to biotech. Dietmar Hopp, a co-founder of the enterprise software firm SAP SE, has been a substantial investor in German biotech. Hopp’s investment in mRNA vaccine developer Curevac AG has been spectacularly successful. The Walldorf-based investment vehicle Dievini Hopp Biotech holding GmbH & Co. KG holds just over 42% of its equity, a stake currently worth \$7.9 billion. The Strüngmann brothers Thomas and Andreas have generated even more wealth from their investment in Germany’s other big mRNA success, Mainz-based Biontech SE. Their stake of more than 47% is now worth more than \$20 billion.

A wider mission

Greve is focused globally rather than nationally but has also attached big ambitions to his biotech investing. “Of course we want to create successful companies,” he said. His present vision is based on building at least one global firm that sells inexpensive therapies to very large populations. It’s a high-risk, high-reward strategy, he said.

But it is just part of a wider humanitarian mission, which is being pursued by his not-for-profit The Forever Healthy foundation. That organization, also based in Karlsruhe, promotes lifespan extension through the development of practical guides that synthesize current medical knowledge on maximizing health, the development of health monitoring protocols, the evaluation of current rejuvenation therapies, and the development of a compound library that hosts information on supplements. It also co-hosts an annual conference, Undoing Aging, which is focused on the “molecular and cellular repair of age-related damage.”