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## Persistence pays for Cavan Carlton

By Michelle Skeen | BRBJ, Courtesy of Detection Technologies

Cavan Carlton likes to set his sights on a goal that seems slightly out of reach, then apply himself "consistently and aggressively" until he reaches it.

He has achieved several goals this way, including starting the U.S. division of Detection Technologies in his basement, working on a home restoration project with Rebuilding Together Lynchburg, and running in multiple 50-kilometer trail traces.

The judges for this year's "20 Under 40" issue named Carlton one of the top members of the class, noting his "impeccable" educational background and his unique path to Virginia.

Originally from Oklahoma, Carlton, 35, earned a bachelor's degree in civil engineering with honors at the University of Texas. From there, he went on to earn two graduate degrees from Rice University: a Master of Business Administration and a Master of Environmental Engineering. He graduated with the highest grade point average in both degree programs, according to his nominator, Brian Taylor, president and chief operating officer of Detection.

In 2002, Carlton and his wife, Soni, decided to leave the "concrete jungle" of Houston for Lynchburg. When his wife, a dermatologist, was offered a job in central Virginia, they jumped at the chance to be close to the mountains.

Another bonus of moving was the prospect of entrepreneurship. A friend of Carlton's from business school, Andrew Miles, came to him with an opportunity from Detection Technologies, a company that works in compressor optimization and fleet management. The Canadian firm wanted to expand in the United States and needed someone to get the U.S. operations going.

Carlton and Miles were the men for the job. They started working out of their homes in Forest with no clients.

"It required a tremendous amount of persistence," Carlton said. It took up to two years to get contracts lined up for many of their original clients. "I took a lot of trips and sales calls all over the eastern United States. ... I'd meet with a guy five, six, seven times to finally get a deal."

Once Detection's U.S. office finally built momentum and a client base, new sales became easier. Carlton and Miles have added 12 employees and expanded to four U.S. offices. Now Carlton can go from working on the inside to developing the company on an executive level.

"The biggest motivation I have is I think our company has only scratched the surface in terms of opportunity," Carlton said. He said the U.S. market is 10 times the size of Canada's, meaning there is plenty of room to grow.

"Cavan is extremely focused and determined in his approach to business," Taylor said.

This year's judges also noted that Carlton pursued his dreams aggressively. "The first five, 10 sales calls are really hard," Carlton said. "If you have confidence in a product, don't get discouraged by early efforts."