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EXCLUSIVE REPORTS

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Local company creates splint to alleviate pain

Stephen Van Drake

A Miramar orthopedics appliance manufacturer says its new soft-sided night splint will eliminate common heel and arch pain in four to six weeks.

Florida Orthopedics, a 25-year-old private company, worked for a year developing a new version of its night splint, which is lighter and soft-sided to encourage patients to wear it.

"Most of our competitors make night splints that are bulky and uncomfortable to wear," President Jerry Slautterback said.

The 205-employee company makes 700 different products with annual revenues "in the mid-\$20 million" range, he said, and manufactures only in the United States.

"When we see a need to improve on a product, we are very fast," Slautterback said. "We are product prolific and have 4,000 medical equipment dealers nationally that will sell 5,000 to 6,000 of our new generation of lighter, soft-sided night splints to treat plantar faciitis in two months."

The splint was recently listed on one of Florida Orthopedics' Web sites at \$69.95, \$10 off the usual price.

Plantar faciitis (heel-spur syndrome) afflicts 2.5 million new victims annually, Slautterback said. In plantar faciitis, the long band of tough fibrous connective tissues running from the heel bone to the toes becomes inflamed from running, walking or bearing too much weight.

"The tendon tightens and hurts like the dickens," he said. "If the night splint is used repeatedly, it's proven to be 95 percent effective."

Medical literature says the most common treatment is using a night split that pulls the toes upward [dorsiflexion], usually in a 0-to-5-degree position, the principle behind Florida Orthopedics' splint.

The company owns 55 patents and 48 registered trademarks, Slautterback said. Most of its employees work in its 12,000-square-foot headquarters and a 72,000-square-foot plant about a mile away. The company also operates a 20,000-square-foot manufacturing plant in Huntersville, N.C., north of Charlotte.

The company sells to pharmacies, home health suppliers and supermarkets.

Recently, Florida Orthopedics started opening new market channels, such as selling by direct mail or through trade journals, said Rhonda Machin, VP of marketing.

E-mail health writer Stephen Van Drake at svandrake@bizjournals.com.

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