



Keith Landy

Ormond Beach, Florida



[Germfree Laboratories Inc](#)

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Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Keith Landy:

Originally founded in 1962, by Dr. Jerome J. Landy, Germfree Laboratories Inc., has grown from manufacturing isolators for gnotobiotic or 'germfree' research to producing a wide array of biosafety equipment to include the Class II and Class III Biological Safety Cabinets and laminar flow cleanroom equipment for hospital pharmacy and microbiological laboratory applications. For over 50 years, Germfree has provided custom specialty systems for applications where the standard 'commercial off the shelf' (COTS) product offerings are not suitable. They've built a solid reputation for innovative engineering and reliable manufacturing and today, their technology is also utilized by many of the top 10 Pharmaceutical and Biotech firms for production and lab applications.

Keith Landy, Jerome Landy's son and CEO of Germfree, shared the journey from a Miami startup to leaders in the industry operating out of a 173,000 square foot environmentally controlled manufacturing plant in Ormond Beach. "I've been involved with Germfree since I was seven years old," Landy said. "As a kid, I would hang around the shop and do small things like clean up and sweep. We were a very small company at first. My father was a medical doctor, and after doing some research, he started the company to produce the equipment that he needed to conduct his germfree research. For a while, he was still practicing on the side before he decided to focus exclusively on Germfree."

When Keith Landy was in college, he started selling for Germfree. He would go on road trips to visit different institutions and really started to learn the business. When his father retired in 2000, Landy took on more responsibility and was now instrumental in much of Germfree's growth.

Landy was later promoted to President, and in 2001, they moved operations and the manufacturing facility north to Ormond Beach. Landy was familiar with Ormond Beach and a business park ideal for manufacturing with the space necessary to continue Germfree's rapid growth.

"When we moved to Ormond, we still weren't a very high-tech company," he said. "We were more of a manual shop not utilizing advanced production methods. Nevertheless, we had some key employees, and fortunately they were willing to move to Ormond to stay with the company. Not long after the move, I recognized that we needed to go in a different direction. My dad was very smart and exceptional with numbers. He was great at running the company at a certain size, but he didn't want to computerize the company and take it to the next level. We

ended up taking some standard products to other markets as custom solutions. That was a turning point for Germfree. We then started diversifying those standard products to different industries which got us into more custom applications that ultimately led to more business sectors. When customers saw that we could customize products, they gave us more opportunities."

Keeping a competitive edge

When Germfree relocated to Ormond Beach, they were selling a lot of equipment to hospital pharmacies and provided specialty equipment to the US Army used in laboratories to detect biological and chemical weapons. After 9/11, additional funding came in to build bio-containment labs, including Class III biological safety cabinets for BSL Laboratories. Business was steady and Germfree was adding employees to meet the growing demand.

When oil prices fell in late 2008, a lot of projects Germfree had in the Middle East evaporated. As a result, Landy strategically planted seeds in the area of hospital pharmacy rental trailers. Germfree operates a fleet of 20 rental trailers, along with a service crew maintaining these mobile compounding pharmacies. That sector took off and, as Landy shared, really helped to drive Germfree into the bio-technology industry.

"For every drug that goes to market, there are 20 that don't," he said. "However, they still go through the same expensive and time-intensive process. The cost to build a clean room is extremely high and there's a shortage of existing spaces. As a result of the cost and high risk, many bio-tech startups are unable to get investor funding. We're providing the bio-tech industry with a solution based on a new concept. Our modular

clean rooms are more durable than our competitors and we make most of the equipment that goes into the bio-tech facilities. This substantially cuts down on cost and risk for bio-tech companies and gives any community, like Bio-Maryland or Bio-Tampa, the ability to build a bio-tech hub. There's a big void in the marketplace and we're plugging that hole."

Germfree is comprised of 130 full-time employees and, as Landy shared, salaries are typically at the upper end of the pay scale for the region. The workforce is made up of Mechanical Engineers, Electrical Engineers, Draftsmen, Certified Welders, Electricians, Plumbers, Assembly Workers, HR Staff, Accountants and IT Staff. The culture can be described as one that encourages a healthy lifestyle. Sugar and birthday cakes have been outlawed and money is given out to employees for doing pushups on their birthdays. Frequent walks are also highly encouraged.

Notable community support

When it comes to philanthropic activities and community support, Germfree supports various educational goals and initiatives throughout Volusia County. One such initiative is a backpack program for the Jewish Federation of Volusia and Flagler Counties. They also support The Volusia Manufacturers Association's support of local high school Science, Technology, Engineering & Math (STEM) education. Further involvement in the community includes the hiring of graduates from The University of Central Florida, Daytona State College, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and other local schools.

What it means to be a Florida Companies to Watch Honoree

"It means that what we've been working on for the last three or four years is being recognized as a viable product," he said. "Much of our recent growth is because of products in these new market segments. It's nice to be honored for that. Employees also like the fact that they're working for a viable company that has been recognized."

In terms of why we were selected, I think it has to do with the fact that we're an older company that had a stagnant growth curve and then re-invented ourselves and started hiring more people at competitive wages. Also, our employees like that we're producing a meaningful product. They know they're at the forefront of something special."

About two years ago, Landy promoted himself to CEO and hired a new president. He recognized the fact that new markets and continual growth require a new president with the right experience. Looking ahead, future goals include pushing into these new markets, most notable the bio-tech industry and working to establish new biotech hubs nationwide. Germfree also wants to expand its modular bioGO product offering to pharmaceutical companies.

Advice for aspiring entrepreneurs

Landy offers up some great advice for aspiring entrepreneurs. "If you analyze every potential risk, you're not going to get anywhere," he said.

"There's always risk. The goal is to minimize the risk. Do your best market research and then take a leap. Also, keep in mind that there are ways to get research without spending a ton of money. Trade shows are a great way to test the market."

Also, opportunities like the Strategic Research Program through GrowFL

are excellent ways to get access to incredibly valuable market research that would normally cost a lot more money. In the past, I have also utilized other resources like SBDC and Enterprise Florida to go after international business, but GrowFL was instrumental in telling us where to plant seeds and where not to plant our seeds. We were given a look at potential expenditures for different markets and learned which markets were suitable for our products and which ones weren't. Learning where not to go is as important as where to invest your time and energy."

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