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The Smartest People in Philadelphia

Meet the brains behind the brightest ideas in Philly right now.

BY **CHRISTINE SPEER LEJEUNE** | OCTOBER 24, 2012



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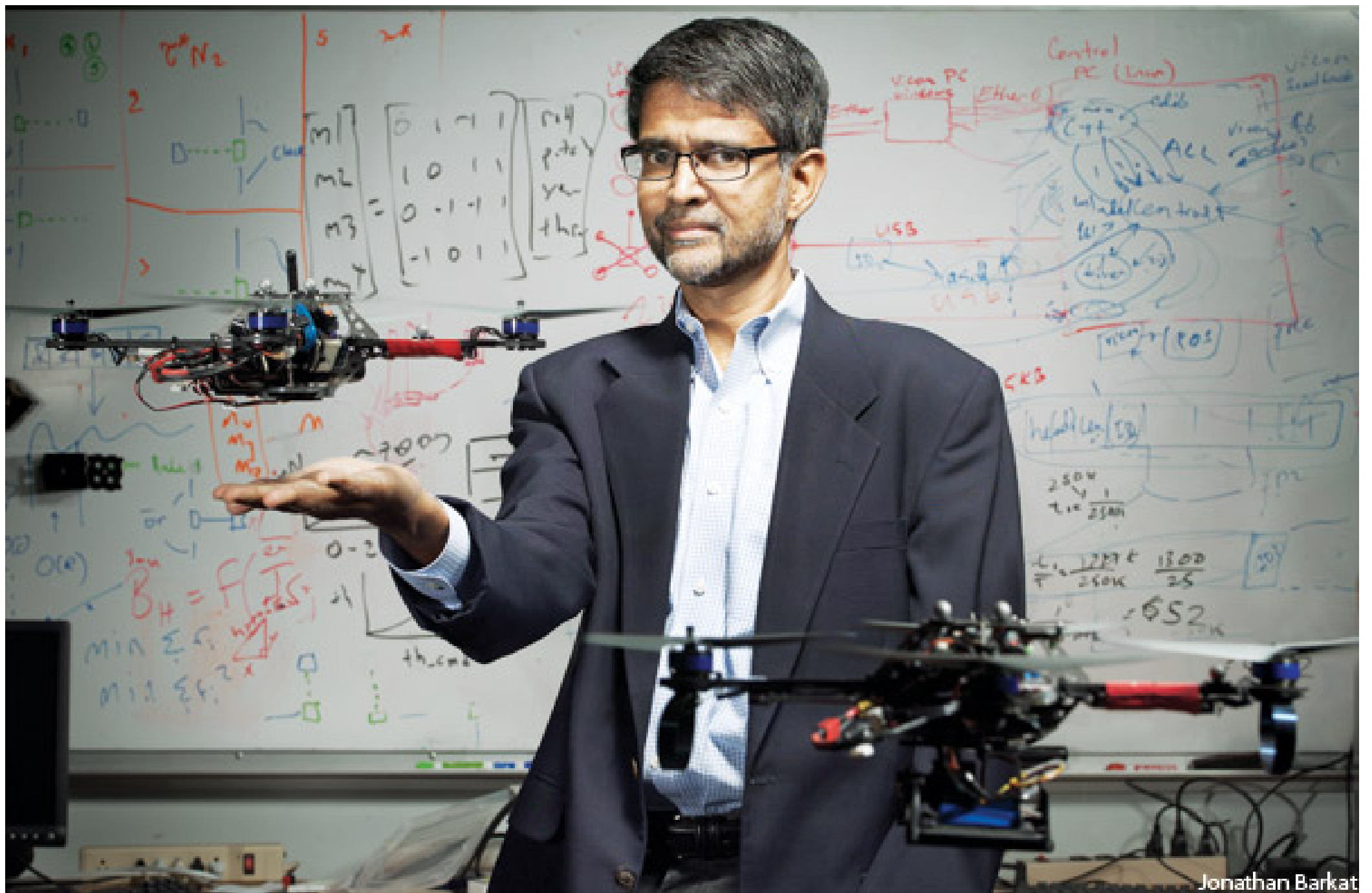
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The Smartest People in Philadelphia

Technology



Jonathan Barkat

Vijay Kumar

Robot Designer

Just when you thought Apple had cornered the market on cool gadgets, along comes Kumar, the 50-year-old Penn prof who has invented tiny (as small as eight inches!) robots that can outmaneuver human-controlled drones, and even create 3-D maps of what they survey. Oh, and yeah: They fly. It's all positively Jetsonian, but Kumar thinks the coolest part lies in application. "I can see a time when a swarm of them can go flying into some emergency situation before the first responders and transmit information," he says. "It's a way to protect human resources." He estimates it will be roughly a year until we see his robots get out and about in the field.

Frank Lee

Gaming Guru

Lee, 43, co-founder and co-director of Drexel's renowned video-game design program,* plans to grow Philly into the Silicon Valley of gaming—not just by training future designers ("I tell freshmen that gaming is an ideal entry point into entrepreneurship"), but also by working with state legislators to give economic incentives to gaming companies. "It's a billion-dollar industry," he says. "I'm very keen on creating a video-game company within Drexel, affiliated with the design program. Philly is a great place for this kind of initiative. Drexel has a gaming program. Penn has an excellent computer-design program. Most communities don't have this foundation to build from. We need to harness and grow it, and we're in the process of doing that now." **In July, Lee's design students won first place at Microsoft's prestigious Imagine Cup.*



Youngjin Yoo

Head of Temple's Apps And Maps

Yoo, 46, director of Temple's Center for Design + Innovation, also heads a cool start-up incubator called Urban Apps & Maps. The idea? Students and North Philly neighbors—particularly high-schoolers, whom Yoo hopes will grow into “civic digital entrepreneurs”—create apps addressing real city needs. One favorite thus far, focused on urban farming, comes complete with temperature and soil-moisture sensors, to help the user find good spots for growing things.

Tony Werner, John Schanz, Cathy Avgiris, Marcien Jenckes, Sree Kotay, Charlie Herrin

The Comcast Brains

Comcast CEO Brian Roberts noted recently to Bloomberg Businessweek that his company's “smart people” were the ones driving the entire industry: The ones who built a country-wide network for broadband. Who are making technologies

that let you manage your house or watch movies or search the Internet on any screen you want. Who are launching something called X1 based on cloud technology, which, to quote video services VP Marcien Jenckes, is a more “social, personalized, mobile and effortless way to watch TV—entirely different from anything you’ve experienced.” Who are turning your iPhone into your remote and your tablet into a movie screen, and working on new ways to power smart screens. And who are letting you DVR that Eagles game from the road, and letting you see your kids get home safely from school. These are those “smart people.”

Puneet Mashehwari

Inventor of DocASAP

So your baby’s screaming from an ear infection, and the receptionist says, “A week from Monday?” No more. Wharton grad Maheshwari, 35, developed DocASAP, an app that searches for nearby physicians with openings when you want them ... who take your exact insurance. The Wawa-ization of health care? So what? “Whether you’re booking a flight, making a restaurant reservation or scheduling a doctor’s appointment,” he says, “you want more information and control.”

Evan Rosenbaum

E-reader wunderkind

Penn student Rosenbaum, 20, is reinventing reading. His EKR Media lets you author an online book that offers video and audio clips, allows reader comments, and is continually updated, so it stays “relevant and sustainable.” He already has a seed-fund deal. “To be a very creative person,” he says, “you have to be willing to throw out convention.”

Robert Cheetham

Software designer

Cheetham, CEO of Callowhill tech company Azavea, is a civic-minded geek's geek. On the cutting edge of Big Data since he worked with the Philly police department straight out of grad school at Penn, he has dreamed up digital solutions for urban analog issues like stormwater runoff, urban forestry and, most notably, crime.

Your program HunchLab predicts crime patterns. Is it just about getting the baddies? It's about improving public safety, making police departments operate more effectively, and providing better data to public safety officials and the general public.

How did the idea develop? My first job out of school was to help start a crime analysis and mapping unit and introduce mapping technology to the police department. The job was just so incredibly fascinating and interesting and challenging.

Where would you like to see HunchLab end up? I hope it gets used in every police department in every major city on the planet. To actually be able to say, "Based on what we understand about the past, here's where we think there are going to be problems"—this is a very important trend in policing. We've got some powerful tools to help support that kind of decision-making process.

So what's next? The next step is introducing this internationally. And we're also working hard to introduce new forecasting techniques.

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