

Northern Innovators



Like so many pinpricks in North Slope tundra, more than 2,000 oil wells penetrate frozen soil to reach gooey deposits formed millions of years ago. Heat and stress from deep within the earth squeeze the viscous liquid to wellheads with such explosive force that each represents a disaster waiting to happen. That threat created a niche for Alaskans who solved a problem for which oil companies had no answer.

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kitchen table in a home

near Anchorage. He pondered the offer just delivered by his neighbor.

"I'm inventing an arctic control system in my garage," Johnson remembers the late Ed Clinton saying. "The (oil companies) might end up buying a bunch of them. Would you like to own part of the company if it takes off? We'll build them and you get to do everything—you get to be the fabricator, you get to be the business guy, you get to be the sales guy."

Then a college student who spent his summers
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