

# WORLD WATER HUB SUCCESS STORY

MICROBE DETECTIVES  
& JOHN TILLOTSON



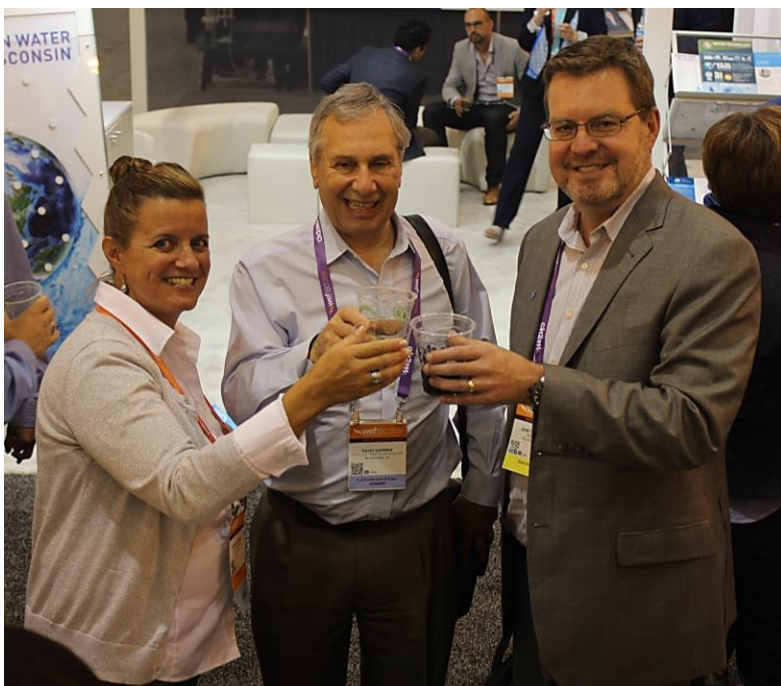
## A PASSION FOR INNOVATION

If you ask John Tillotson what motivates him, his answer probably won't surprise you—his passion for innovation, clean water and environmental sustainability has influenced every phase of his career. As the CEO of Microbe Detectives and a coach for The Water Council's BREW Accelerator for start-ups, Tillotson has coached more than 20 startups throughout his tenure at the Global Water Center (GWC).

Tillotson's impressive past includes roles as the CMO of Phigenics, an innovator in preventing waterborne diseases from building water systems; VP of sales and marketing for nPhase, an Internet-of-Things cloud platform; product and marketing manager at Nalco, one of the world's largest water treatment chemical companies and a toxic use reduction consultant for the Massachusetts Toxics Use Reduction Institute and the United Nations Institute of Training and Research. Impressive to say the least.

**"It's a phenomenal opportunity to network and access resources with others at the Global Water Center in Milwaukee. Being there helps to build credibility in our story. It's an amazing community."**

**-John Tillotson**



During his years with Phigenics, Tillotson met Dean Amhaus and eventually toured the GWC.

**"After my tour of the Global Water Center, someone asked me what I thought about it — I told them that I felt like I was at Disney World®," said Tillotson. "I had not seen anything like it in my more than 20 years in the water industry. I found it extremely exciting!"**

When Tillotson was preparing to start his own business, his first call was to The Water Council who introduced him to the founder of Microbe Detectives, a BREW startup located in the GWC. Soon after, Tillotson signed on with the company as CEO and co-owner with Trevor Ghylin, PhD.

*Elizabeth Thelen, David Garman and John Tillotson sampling re-use beer from Milwaukee at WEFTEC 2016.*

## DRIVING TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

Founded in 2013, Microbe Detectives is a graduate of The Water Council's BREW Accelerator and a winner of the Wisconsin Innovation Awards. The technology provides comprehensive microbial evaluations for water quality and disease management. It applies advanced DNA sequencing to identify and quantify nearly 100 percent of the microbes in a sample of water, delivering actionable insight. In comparison, other existing technologies such as culture or microscopy, can only identify about 1 percent or less of microbes. Microbe Detectives enables groundbreaking opportunities to reduce costs, improve energy output and generate new revenue streams in wastewater, anaerobic digestion, process water and other biological systems.

**"The technology we are working with is driving transformative change across all of life sciences. We have specialized the application of this technology to address water management issues and are literally the first-mover in North America."**

For years, Tillotson and Ghylin have worked closely with the Great Lakes Genomics Center at UW-Milwaukee's School of Freshwater Sciences, and have tapped into the many resources available to them through The Water Council. As a BREW graduate and GWC tenant, Microbe Detectives has become an important part of the water technology community in Milwaukee. In fact, Tillotson was recruited by Elizabeth Thelen of The Water Council to be a coach for the BREW Accelerator.



**"We really are a close community and are supportive of one another," said Tillotson. "The Water Council has been very helpful in our brand development efforts. I've also been fortunate to serve as a BREW coach going on three years now, where I've learned a ton and developed fantastic relationships."**

The Microbe Detectives team plans to keep its operations in Milwaukee due to The Water Council, the GWC and related water communities nearby within Milwaukee's Water Technology District. These resources and support systems have been effective assets to the business that the company continues to benefit from.

Tillotson also cites collaboration as an essential component of Microbe Detectives' success. "To me, collaboration is a disruption to the traditional water industry model, which is why I like it. It represents the future." Microbe Detectives has developed a process that simplifies and improves accuracy in recognizing potential threats to the water supply being tested, and is used by both modern municipalities and developing-world communities. This highly innovative technology has, and will continue to, change the world. Companies like Microbe Detectives can be found throughout Milwaukee and the GWC. This mecca of water technology has become a destination and a home to some of the most groundbreaking tech startups in the industry.



**"I'm not aware of anything in the world even remotely similar or effective to what's happening here at the GWC," said Tillotson. "Where else can you find 22 water tech innovators that have been selected in a highly competitive environment to incubate their technologies and businesses over a nine-month program? Adding to this innovation are corporate sponsorships by industry giants like A. O. Smith and Badger Meter and research being conducted by UW-Milwaukee and Marquette - all within one building where 40+ water companies reside along with the School of Freshwater Sciences' multi-million-dollar genomics lab. It's literally the Disney World® of water technology. You've got to see it and live it to know it. I'm certainly glad I have. I feel extremely lucky."**