

CEO and Co-founder Sorin Grama, a native of Romania, has been featured in the recent publication Immigrant, Inc., a book that chronicles the stories of the many immigrant entrepreneurs in America and the roles they're playing as "innovators and job creators." Read the following excerpt on Sorin's journey to founding Promethean Power¹:

"Three hours north of Harlem, in the renovated offices of an old twine mill near the MIT campus in Cambridge, Massachusetts, another immigrant pursues a dream with the power to bring change. Sorin Grama, an immigrant from Romania, founded Promethean Power Systems with his classmate and American-born business partner, Sam White.

Their creation sits in the middle of a room like some unfinished science-fair entry. Wires noodle out of a stack of black, stereo-like boxes that encase a Styrofoam cooler. A slab of solar panel stands nearby, ready to go on top.

The strange tower is a prototype of a solar-powered milk cooler – a practical refrigerator for the Third World. The technology is early, the money is tight, and the company did not yet have a nameplate on the door in early 2009.

'That's \$200,' Grama explained. 'I'd rather put that into the research.'

But there's momentum. The idea was a runner-up winner at the 2007 MIT \$100K Entrepreneurship Competition, which draws hundreds of enterprising teams from the Boston area. A blown-up copy of the \$10,000 prize check is pinned to a wall, next to a map of India. On a whiteboard, beside a confusion of algorithms and computer code, is a diagram of the 'milk trail' in rural India – dotted lines tracing the routes from farm to dairy to market.

That's a trek that often ends with spoiled milk. Fixing it has become Grama's passion.

His father defected from communist Romania in the early 1980s and gained political asylum in America. It took five years, but a teenaged Sorin, his mother, and his sister were allowed to join him in 1987. A degree in electrical engineering from Ohio State University led to a job in the computer industry in California. In his mid-thirties, feeling the urge to try something new, Grama enrolled at MIT. In 2007, he wrote the business plan for a five-member team that *almost* won the entrepreneurship competition and its \$100,000 grand prize.

Afterward, most of the team members pursued other interests. But Grama and White stuck with the idea, which was inspired by a Peace Corps worker. They used their share of the prize money to fly to India and to explore the milk trail. They learned how fresh milk was collected, moved, and packaged. They talked with farmers. They met with a dairy manager.

They changed their plans.

The contest idea called for a mini-power plant for rural villages off the grid. But the pair realized that electricity was not enough. The villages were too poor and too remote.

'The need is for a complete system that can accomplish the task,' explained Grama the engineer. 'Cold storage.'

By blending Grama's knowledge of thermo-electronics with advances in photovoltaics, the pair hopes to manufacture solar-powered refrigerators run by simple microprocessors. They are focusing on chilled milk because that is what everyone drinks. But Grama sees other, life-changing applications. The solar cooler could preserve yogurt, mother's milk, and medicines in villages lacking electricity. It could change life for millions.

His eyes light up at the thought.

'I look at it as one of the last frontiers to conquer,' bringing refrigeration anywhere in the world, said Grama the dreamer. 'It's not something a lot of people want to bother with. We're crazy enough to try it.'

An angel investor, perhaps equally crazy, gave them \$50,000 to keep going. Grama hoped to have a prototype solar-powered cold storage system ready by 2010. He'd like to test it in India, then commence production.

He talks like a person in a hurry, like an immigrant entrepreneur. The world is shrinking. Milk is spoiling. He has an idea. But it's more of a dream, really. "

¹*Excerpt from:*

Herman, R. T., & Smith, R. L. (2010). *Immigrant, Inc.: Why Immigrant Entrepreneurs Are Driving the New Economy (and how they will save the American worker)*. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

<http://www.amazon.com/Immigrant-Inc-Entrepreneurs-Driving-American/dp/0470455713>