His penchant for action led him to Columbia forward and overcome impediments, Geller said. “We never worry about getting our great product,” he said.

Most people’s vision of a venture capitalist involves a black-suited professional in aapologetically clean offices. That is not Ehud Geller ’70, who helped found Israel’s vibrant biotech venture scene. He builds companies the hands-on way.

Geller’s firm, Medica Venture Partners, manages $200 million, invested in more than 30 pharmaceutical and medical device companies. Some consist of nothing more than a handful of academics and a clever idea. Others are larger but struggling to break into the big time.

Their entrepreneurs command Geller’s attention. They are dedicated enough to risk everything on a new technology, but often naively about business. “Sometimes we have to go in there and get the technology guy to move over for a business manager, or focus their strategy to take advantage of a good product,” he said.

Geller and his partners are former senior health-care executives. “We never worry about getting our hands dirty, just about helping companies move forward and overcome impediments,” Geller said.

His penchant for action led him to Columbia Engineering. After two years at Israel’s well-regarded but highly regimented Technion, he was not excited. “I got a feeling like the students were interfering with the good life of the professors,” he recalled. When a Columbia student told him about his school, Geller transferred.

He gravitated to chemical engineering. One day at Mudd cafeteria, he and several seniors began talking about job prospects. One proposed that chemical engineers were uniquely qualified for life sciences because they thought of the body in terms of systems, operations, processes, transport, and catalysis.

Geller tried that reasoning on the vice president of R&D at pharmaceutical maker Wyeth Laboratories. “He looked at me, smiled, and said, ‘Let’s give it a try.’” Geller moved to Philadelphia. He also enrolled in Drexel University, where he completed an MBA he had started at Columbia and a PhD in chemical engineering. At Wyeth, he rotated between research, manufacturing, and corporate offices. He was an entrepreneur before anyone had a name for it.

After seven years at Wyeth, he returned to Israel and took a position as CEO of Ikapharm, where he built an FDA-approved plant to export generic drugs to the United States. Teva, a conglomerate with a large pharmaceutical business, then recruited him to run its pharmaceutical business.

In the early 1990s, Geller proposed to quintuple Teva’s size to $1 billion by establishing a pharmaceutical business in the United States. It was the start of the company’s transformation into the world’s largest generic drug maker.

Success left Geller bored. He described Teva as a well-oiled machine with not enough problems to keep him busy. He eventually left for a biotech start-up, Interpharm, which he built into a company worth $380 million.

After leaving Interpharm, Geller played a key role in establishing Yozma, an $80 million government-backed fund of funds designed to jumpstart Israel’s backed innovation.

Geller left Yozma to start Medica, Israel’s first dedicated life science and healthcare investment fund, where he brings his hands-on management style to many new start-ups.

As the 21st century dawned, millions of people around the globe live in communities without electricity. Sameer Shetty MS’93 is working to change that by building small-scale hydroelectric plants to help bring these rural areas into the modern age.

“Hydro power is clean and renewable,” says Shetty, managing director of B. Fouress Ltd. in Bangalore, India. “It has the capability to help alleviate poverty in regions where so many people currently have no access to power.”

Shetty, who grew up in Mumbai, India, came to Columbia in 1992, after earning his bachelor’s degree at DePauw University in Indiana. At Columbia, he studied operations research and industrial engineering, developing the expertise needed to return to India to work in the family business, which at the time was primarily specializing in industrial values for the oil and gas, steel, power, and water industries.

His projects are “water-to-wire”—the plants take in water to turn the turbines, which create electricity that gets sent to the power grid.

The plants developed by B. Fouress are small, generating up to 25 megawatts per turbine—enough to power a small community and feed more power into the electric grid. These projects don’t run into the environmental issues faced by huge dams, which flood large areas and displace residents.

Projects in the Philippines, Turkey, and the Philippines, among other countries across the globe. Shetty’s turbines are creating electricity at hydro plants being built in Central and South America, Africa, Europe, India, and Southeast Asia. The electric generators that create power from the spinning turbines are made in Brazil, Romania, Spain, Italy, France, India, and China.

While at Columbia, Shetty was impressed by the intellectual passion and dedication of his classmates, who created the atmosphere that inspired him to delve deeply into analyzing engineering problems and using technology to resolve them.

After his father died in 2007, Shetty decided to help Columbia Engineering recruit more top Indian students by endowing a fund that supports annual trips by admissions counselors to top Indian high schools.

“Columbia provided me with a great education and great memories,” he says. “So this was a way to ensure that Columbia’s name becomes better known throughout India.”