

Shawn Kelly, Carnegie Mellon University & Bionic Eye Technologies

When Shawn Kelly moved back to Pittsburgh over the summer, he joined the growing ranks of the region's boomerangers.

The youngest of six siblings, Kelly had left his hometown, Baldwin in the South Hills, to attend the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

He earned his degree in electrical engineering, then moved on to a master's and doctorate and a visiting scientist position at MIT. He had been in Boston for 19 years and bought a house, but, he was looking to come home.

"I grew up here and had family here, and I was dating someone here," he said. "I had been working in an academic environment, and was looking to move into a faculty position and looking to be in Pittsburgh,

and CMU was my first choice."

Kelly is a research faculty member in the university's Institute for Complex Engineered Systems.

He also is working to get his own life sciences company, Bionic Eye Technologies, off the ground. At first, he was unsure about the prospect of starting his company from Pittsburgh.

"I had been worried I was away for so long and worried about the opportunities to start a company here," he said. "I learned about (Innovation Works) and (Pittsburgh Life Sciences Greenhouse), and the start-ups coming out of CMU, and it definitely made my decision easier."

While Kelly was in Boston, he recalls that the piece of Pittsburgh he missed most was the city's excitement around its

sports teams.

Once the decision was made to come back, Kelly settled in familiar territory, buying a house in Whitehall not far from where he grew up.

Though he loves Pittsburgh, Kelly said he would like to see the region attract more large engineering companies.

"I think we don't have quite as strong a set of high-tech large companies as some other cities do, and I hope that we can improve in upping that."

If that happens, he said, perhaps the city will be able to keep more CMU graduates in the area.

"I think it would draw more people and lift the economy more," he said.

— BY MALIA SPENCER