

Revision Eyewear, Based In Williston, Garners Contracts Of About \$10 Million For U.S. Army



The combat eyewear on this soldier was designed by the local company, which will ship 178,000 sets of Sawfly eyewear and 85,000 sets of Desert Locust goggles to protect Army personnel.

BY MELODY BODETTE

Revision Eyewear of Williston, a developer of ballistic eyewear, has received contracts to provide the U.S. Army with 178,000 sets of Sawfly eyewear and 85,000 sets of Desert Locust ballistic goggles. The contracts for just under \$10 million came as the company marked its fifth anniversary. The contract comes on the heels of a previous contract for \$4 million that was awarded with the help of Senator Patrick Leahy. Revision Eyewear began working with the U.S. military in 2004. After a year and a half of evaluation and trial, eyewear testing and certification, the company now supplies eyewear to the military.

Revision Eyewear has grown exponentially in its five years, according to Jonathon Blanshay, president of Revision Eyewear. "By the end of last year we'd grown by 1,500 percent over the four previous years. If I look back, it's over 4,000 percent in five years, although we've had no time to look back because we're focused on the future. We want to be the number one military eyewear company in the world."

Military and tactical clients, such as law enforcement and border control personnel, represent 98 percent of Revision Eyewear's sales. The eyewear is retailed in some locations for hunting and shooting enthusiasts. In addition to the U.S. Army, Revision has supplied eyewear for the Canadian Land Force, the Singapore Army and the British Army. "On average, 80 percent of our sales are in North America, with the vast bulk in the United States. Twenty percent is international," says Blanshay. He predicts that over time international demand will increase as Australia, the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Germany and other countries are starting to make protective eyewear mandatory.

Revision Eyewear frequently receives e-mails from soldiers abroad, thanking them for the eyewear. "It's extremely rewarding when you get the e-mails and pictures showing that the eyewear has literally saved their lives. It's rewarding to not just me, but all the employees. What we're doing is not just making a product,

but actually helping young men and women in harm's way," says Blanshay.

Blanshay cites figures that in Vietnam only two percent of injuries were to the eyes. With the threat of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in Iraq that figure has increased to 16 percent. "Now they've seen the numbers start to come down because soldiers have better quality eyewear such as ours," says Blanshay.

While Revision Eyewear's products meet specifications in terms of optics and scratch resistance, product development also focuses on comfort. Revision's Sawfly products look like sunglasses, and the Desert Locust resembles ski goggles. Both come with interchangeable lenses for night and day. Revision will have six product lines by the end of the year.

The majority of Revision Eyewear's operations are in Williston: assembly, shipping, quality control, customer service, half of sales and marketing efforts, some research and design, and engineering. The company's Montreal office is for finance and engineering. The product components are outsourced and manufactured in the northeast in New York and Rhode Island, with the bulk of manufacturing in the Boston area. Ninety percent of Revision's manufacturing happens in the United States. Blanshay states that high figure is due to military legal requirements to make the products in the United States, but says it's also important to the company for marketing and positioning purposes.

Revision Eyewear has grown swiftly in its five years to 63 employees, of which 40 are in Williston. The company has outgrown its location and has signed a lease on a new building in Essex Junction that should suit their needs for up to 10 years. The company started in Canada in early 2002 as a development company for sporting goods eyewear. After being approached by the Canadian military they realized there was an under-served market for ballistic eyewear. When they were approached by the U.S. military they realized the need for a U.S. presence and Vermont was chosen for its proximity to Montreal and its work force. □

Vermont Center For Emerging Technology Is UVM-Affiliated Incubator Space In Burlington

BY MARY ANN DISPIRITO

Farrell Hall Library on the Trinity Campus of the University of Vermont is now home to the Vermont Center of Emerging Technologies (VCET), incubator space that is specifically designed to promote and accelerate the transfer of technology developed by university and industry while increasing the number of successful technology-based small businesses in Vermont. "We're not doing anything new, there's a lot of incubators around the world," says Thomas Rainey, VCET president. "This is a different type of incubator space. There's less emphasis on space — we have resident companies and affiliate companies. We have five resident companies that are in-house, and three that have graduated from VCET. We are working with a half-dozen other companies that we call pre-qualification clients: they're not ready yet, but they are promising."

VCET grew out of the need for the University of Vermont to find a method in which technology transfer could be more easily accomplished. "The University recognized they were doing around \$200 million in sponsored research and that level of research was increasing. They realized they could do a much better job in transferring technology," Rainey says. A feasibility study was conducted and the report issued in February of 2003. "The study looked at all ramifications and concluded that a technology incubator program could be successful. Two pillars were already in place; the idea generation/validation, and the opportunity recognition/assessment. The thing that was really missing was that there was no logical place to hand that off. What was missing was a dedicated and targeted initiative that would surround those opportunities with the right mix of resources."

The study also showed that the best model for Vermont was to do it on a small scale. The staff of the 501(c)(3) organization would be a small experienced team with access to an extensive network of mentors, advisors, MBA interns and alumni. "What we are trying to do here is that, once an opportunity is determined to be commercially viable, we surround that with top-notch resources. Our board members are cheerleaders and strategic door openers for the companies affiliated with us," Rainey says.

It was also determined that VCET would be more successful if established as a separate not-for-profit organization affiliated with the University of Vermont rather than becoming a department or division of the university. "Some of the thinking was related to the fact that we wanted to have other academic partners," explains Rainey. "We would be a resource to all of those institutions." VCET is also affiliated with Norwich University and the Vermont State Colleges system.

Since the University of Vermont is the largest research facility in Vermont, it made sense to develop an affiliation with the university. "We wanted to be on or near the campus. As part of that affiliation, the university was generous to provide the lower level of Farrell Hall Library. We started small with 4,000 square feet of space," Rainey says. An appropriation obtained through Senator Leahy's efforts provided the funding to develop the reception area and office spaces. "It's just a gorgeous location for us. We used 34 different Vermont vendors to do the renovation. We challenged them to let their imaginations run wild. We wanted the space to reflect the creativity and the sense of possibility that you normally find in entrepreneurship. The other challenge we gave them was that it had to be affordable. For under \$100 per square foot, we were able to create a really exciting space."

"We were fortunate when we launched VCET that the whole concept was embraced and supported by President Dan Fogel of UVM. UVM donated space for the program. The State of Vermont assisted VCET in some initial planning and operational funding. Then we were successful in obtaining a USDA Rural Development Grant, which helped us with expenses until we had rental income. Our goal is to gradually wean ourselves off of the federal and state funding and become self-sufficient. One way we intend to do this is through rental income from our facilities. We do charge for some services. Companies in the resident program exchange a one-percent equity share for each year they're in the program, unless they have a previous equity arrangement with UVM."

VCET is advancing in three phases. The first

phase is the Farrell Hall space on campus. The second phase surrounds a 21,000-square-foot building just purchased in Colchester; located off exit 16, the former Weimann Lamphere building will continue to house present tenants and backfill with VCET companies. "Over the next few years we will institute a third phase in life sciences. We've seen a steady demand for wet lab space and more life sciences space, which we don't have."

Selection is stringent and companies must meet criteria. "By accepting a company, we're essentially putting a seal of approval on them. They must have compelling markets, proprietary technology and some barriers to entry. Once selected, companies receive coaching and mentoring from both onsite and affiliated experts; direct connections to angel investors and venture capital resources; availability of research and teaching faculty, and student interns; access to two libraries and specialized research databases; and collaboration with private and public partners. The latter includes the Vermont Technology Council, the Department of Economic Development, the Vermont Business Roundtable, Norwich University, Vermont State Colleges, private corporations and federal laboratories."

Global Classroom USA, an education technology company, is a current resident client. Professors, teachers, and published subject-matter experts author and teach classes online to Global Classroom students nationwide.

Other resident clients exemplify the technological focus. Parallel Geometry, Inc., which has developed advanced 3-D simulation/visualization products involving urban planning, geo-tourism, medical simulations, and other related applications. PIEmatrix LLC will provide software that integrates and governs processes to reduce IT project risk. This software centralizes a set of best-practices processes across an organization and integrates different processes (associated steps) to enhance efficiency. SemiProbe LLC is developing probe station equipment for semiconductor designers, fabricators, and test companies involved in the wafer and packaged level testing of integrated circuits, printed circuit boards and discrete components. VenueCzar, Inc is a mutual on-click reservation system that automates the process of booking entertainment acts in local venues. Although termed "resident" clients, SemiProbe is physically located in Colchester and VenueCzar is in Montpelier.

VCET has four graduates/alumni. Electrocell Technologies, Inc. and Bulldog Entertainment Network graduated from the VCET program in August of 2006. Electrocell has developed a proprietary agricultural technology for treating animal waste that destroys pathogens and reduces nutrient levels thereby reducing farm odor, improving animal and farmer health, and greatly reducing the environmental impacts resulting from wastewater run-off and pollution. Bulldog Entertainment has the exclusive right to commercialize the interactive game technology, products, and Photo Play brand in the United States belonging to Funworld out of Europe. Bulldog is not a reseller or distributor; it is a product development company. Apollo SRI is an early-stage company commercializing a UVM-patented technology, acid-prepared mesoporous silica, a nano material for high performance liquid chromatography. Draker-Solar Design, an engineering firm, specializes in renewable energy monitoring and integration systems.

Board members represent public, private, and academic liaisons. Luther "Fred" Hackett, chairman and president of Hackett, Valine & MacDonald Corporation is VCET's board chair. Other members are Briar Alpert, president of Bio-Tek Instruments; Frances Carr, vice president of Research & Graduate Studies at the University of Vermont; Frank Cioffi, president of the Greater Burlington Industrial Corporation (GBIC) and Cynosure, Inc.; Robert Clarke, chancellor of Vermont State Colleges; Kevin Dorn, secretary of Vermont's Agency of Commerce and Community Development; John N. Evans, dean of the University of Vermont's College of Medicine; J. Michael Gower, vice president of Finance & Administration at UVM; Michael J. Marx, Facilities & Site Operations manager at IBM; Richard Schneider, president of Norwich University; and Lisa Ventriss, executive director of the Vermont Business Roundtable. □

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TD Banknorth International Trade Event
Thursday, May 24 from 9:30 - 11 a.m.
Diamond Ballroom
Guest Speaker: Marc Lévesque, Chief Market Economist with TD Securities.

Senator Leahy's E-Business Seminar and Technology Luncheon
presented by One Communications
Thursday, May 24 from 12 - 1:30 p.m.
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