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Verve

The Spirit of Small Business

RODS-N-BOBB'S



Local fishing company casts into new markets

Even in this down economy, Rod-N-Bobb's Incorporated has found ways to rise to the top of their product category. This is due to the company introducing innovative products that allows the company to show steady business growth.

Rod-N-Bobb's, a fishing tackle and supply company manufactures well-designed day and night fishing products and has introduced many patents to the market. Gary and Ann Bennis, owners of Rod-N-Bobb's, began in their small Eau Claire garage in 1992, from there the company moved a few times

to accommodate the growth, and in 2002, a larger warehouse was needed and the company relocated to Fall Creek. Currently, Rod-N-Bobb's employs six full-time and 14 part-time employees.

The company's first patent and most popular product, the Universal Beacon, is just one of its 160 products. The Universal Beacon is a lighted bobber attachment for night fishing. They also introduced two new lines of bobbers this year: Summer Ice™ and Mr. Ice™. These foam bobbers allow fishermen to adjust the buoyancy, reducing resistance at the surface of the water. Summer Ice™ is such a hit in the market that it made the cover of In-Fisherman magazine's April 2010 edition.

Rod-N-Bobb's products are distributed across the country to many retail locations including Gander Mountain, Academy Sports, and Wal-Mart.

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INNOVATION FOUNDATION OF WESTERN WISCONSIN

The Board of Directors for the Innovation Foundation of Western Wisconsin held their first meeting on April 30 in Eau Claire. At this meeting the Board discussed many items including the organizational purpose, identified and approved the submission of national grant applications and selected a corporate logo (right).



The Board of Directors is currently made up of eight professionals from around the Eau Claire area, with the intent of growing the Board to seventeen members. Representation will be added from western Wisconsin and the Minneapolis market. The Initial Board of Directors include: Doug Olson (Chippewa Valley Technical College/NanoRite), Stuart Schaefer (Commonweal Development), Mike Richards (Hutchinson Technology Inc.), Craig Carlson, Jerry Chasteen, Dennis Pope (Luther Midelfort Mayo Health System), Timm Boettcher (Realityworks, Inc.) and Brian Doudna.

The Foundation's officers for 2010 include:

President: Mike Richards

President Elect: Timm Boettcher

Secretary: Brian Doudna

Treasurer: Doug Olson

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RESOLUTION SUPPORTING WISCONSIN COMPETITIVENESS STUDY

Wisconsin Economic Development Association (WEDA) is supporting an independent study of Wisconsin's competitiveness and positioning. WEDA is requesting all of its member organizations adopt a resolution in support of the Competitiveness Study, which is expected to include program and policy recommendations to align and advance local, regional and statewide economic development efforts.

The Competitiveness and Positioning Study is advancing as the first Steering Committee meeting was held in April. WEDA has introduced ways for membership to provide comments and feedback to the selected consultants, (Deloitte).

Newsletter Sponsor



2010 AWARD PRESENTED TO CURT MANUFACTURING



Holding the Paragon Award are Curt Tambornino (left) and Gregg Hooks (right). Also in the photo are members of CURT Manufacturing's management team, Economic Development Board Members, City of Altoona representatives and Paragon Award sponsor RCU.

CURT Manufacturing was presented the 2010 Paragon Economic Impact Award at the EDC's Annual Luncheon on February 22. They currently have 194 employees and exceed \$50 million in annual sales at their Eau Claire location. In total they operate 9 facilities in the US and Canada. Each year, the award is presented to a company for contributing to the Eau Claire area economy as well as investing in its employees, facilities, equipment and new technologies.

Innovation is imperative to CURT Manufacturing's success and they stick to their motto of "Only Constant is Change". The owner, Curt Tambornino, has developed 10 of the company's 19 patents. The team at CURT Manufacturing believes that e-commerce is the future of sales and is currently selling products online. With a twenty-four hour turn-around on orders, their goal is to always deliver products within two days.

The company also invests in the area's communities. The Altoona Youth Hockey Association was in need of arena seating and CURT Manufacturing built and donated the bleachers.

The 2010 award was designed by Laurie Bieze and sponsored by RCU. Visit the news section at www.eauclaire-wi.com for more information.



REGIONAL BUSINESS FUND HELPS FIRST DOWNTOWN EAU CLAIRE BUSINESS

In 2009, the Regional Business Fund (RBF) Board of Directors determined that the businesses within the City of Eau Claire would be able to participate in the program. The EDC collaborated with the City of Eau Claire to supply a portion of the \$500,000 contribution that was required. The City of Eau Claire City Council agreed to pay \$350,000 and the EDC Board of Directors and County Board of Supervisors agreed to reallocate \$150,000 from the County Revolving Loan Fund. To date, the City has made its contribution and the EDC has paid \$100,000. These payments have made all businesses within the City of Eau Claire eligible for RBF programs.

Recently, the City of Eau Claire approved a RBF micro-loan to the Hair Den in Downtown Eau Claire for internal renovations to the full service salon. This loan continues the reinvestment in downtown Eau Claire that has been seen over the past decade. Another loan program of the RBF can be used for Downtown Façade, which is designed to revitalize downtown communities in the region. Downtown Eau Claire will use this program to assist property and business owners when building exteriors are in need of updates and revitalization, and, as these photos show, Fall Creek has already been able to successfully utilize these programs.

For more information on the RBF and the programs offered, visit <http://www.rbfinc.org/Programs/programs.html>



Fall Creek's Karen R. Hurd utilized the Façade loan and micro-loan to renovate her Nutritional Practice.

CYOB CONTEST – 2010 REDESIGN EFFORT



The EDC Board of Directors have been seeking methods to enhance and fully fund the long standing Creating Your Own Business Contest that was first implemented in 1986.

Many successful businesses received recognition and assistance through the contest. Some of the contest businesses include: StrandWare (1989), Rod-N-Bobb's (1992), Silicon Logic Engineering (1996), Premier Dies Corp. (2001).

For the past several years, the EDC Board has been reviewing the performance and modifying the Creating Your Own Business contest. The contest was redesigned in 2009 so that the cash prize was tied to measurements and work plans designed by CYOB judges and EDC staff that would advance the business. Also, it was decided that more weight should be placed on business viability to ensure the long-term success of the contest winner. As part of this process, the cash award was also reduced due to the EDC's budget restraints.

In January, the Board discussed the program in detail with the recommendation to reinstate the larger cash award of \$10,000 while keeping the other modifications in place. Funding this cash prize, however, has remained a challenge. After reviewing the funding alternatives for the program, it was the decision of the EDC Board to not implement the contest in 2010 but focus on 2011. The ABD committee will focus on restructuring the program funding model and will present to the Board at their September 2010 meeting for implementation in 2011.

Moving Innovation Forward

RBF MICRO LOAN AWARDED TO DAIRYLAND DELIGHTS



The EDC recently awarded a loan to Dairyland Delights in the amount of \$20,000 through the Regional Business Fund's Micro Loan program. Dairyland Delights bakes gourmet cheesecakes and baked goods in Eau Claire. Melissa Overby, is the owner and opened her bakery in 2002.

The loan proceeds will be used to purchase equipment to help the company meet their production requirements, while also assisting them with the goal of diversifying their revenue streams.

Overby commented, "The loan proceeds will enable us to purchase a walk-in freezer and take our production capacity to the next level. We have more than doubled our production each year for the past three years and the new freezer will enhance our flow."

Dairyland Delights provides baked goods to catalog, fundraising and food service businesses. One of the company's keys to success is that Overby works with her vendors to develop new products for their catalogs. For one contract alone, the company produced 110,000 mini three-ounce breads.

Overby is excited about adding a new contract that will help support year around production. Now, the company is also looking at creating a new e-commerce web site to help diversify the company's sales targeted to consumers rather than businesses. To date, Overby has created 191 different flavored cheesecakes and will be able to sell them with the new e-commerce Web site.

In January 2010, Dairyland Delights relocated to the old Silver Springs plant, increasing location square footage to over 13,000 from 3,200. As they have grown, Dairyland Delights has also hired additional staff. They employ 12 full-time employees and estimate 40 will be needed in the next two years to meet their production needs during peak seasons.

FOUNDATION

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The Purpose of the Innovation Foundation of Western Wisconsin:

To provide strategic counsel, operational guidance, and infrastructure support to individuals and companies seeking to license, develop or advance early stage or existing innovations as part of a successful western Wisconsin business.

The Foundation is working with the Regional Planning Commission to advance its purpose and is seeking to address the management and skill gap that faces our region's businesses and innovators. Innovators frequently stumble and the Innovation Foundation will provide services in western Wisconsin. It is time to fully support and address the gaps of those individuals and businesses.

FORBES RANKS EAU CLAIRE IN TOP 50

Eau Claire was ranked number forty-eight on the list of Best Small Places for Business and Careers by Forbes.com. The latest Forbes article, released on April 14, 2010, ranked the top 184 cities for small business and careers in the United States.

Cities were ranked based on multiple factors including the cost of doing business, educational attainment, and job growth (past and present). Other factors included cultural opportunities and quality of life issues. It also highlighted Eau Claire's largest private company, Menards, and named National Presto Industries "best small company".

Eau Claire is the highest ranked Wisconsin city, followed by Appleton (No. 53), La Crosse (No. 60), Oshkosh, (No. 62), Wausau (No. 95), and Racine (No. 96).

The Best Small Places for Business and Careers is an extension list of the twelfth annual Best Places for Business and Careers list. It was developed after reviewing the 200 largest metropolitan cities across the U.S. Research was provided by Moody's Economy.com.

See full list and additional information about Forbes' Best Small Places for Business and Careers at http://www.forbes.com/lists/2010/5/business-places-10_Best-Small-Places-For-Business-And-Careers_Rank.html.

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ACROSS THE BOARD



In this issue of Area Growth, we announced the first meeting of a new charitable foundation focused on innovation in western Wisconsin. This foundation is designed to build a strong strategic asset for the region allowing entrepreneurs and companies to thrive without having all of the key ingredients

such as strong business development or management experience in place.

The vision behind this foundation is simple, “provide critical talent to startups and existing companies” increasing their chance of long term success. It is a vital approach to long term business growth in western Wisconsin.

Modeled after other successful programs in other parts of the country, this foundation is a separate organization with a separate mission that complements the services of the Eau Claire Area Economic Development Corporation. The EDC’s and our partner’s experience over the past three years document the need to inject critical skills to make a new venture a worthy investment, and ultimately, a success.

The talent, anticipated to be mostly business development and business management expertise, would be provided to startups for a small fee, as appropriate to the business opportunity. In return for packaging and helping to get a new venture off the ground and through the commonly referred to “valley of death”, the foundation would look at a fee structure that would benefit from the services that were provided to drive revenue to the company. This type of agreement tied to the client success will be used to provide long-term funding for the foundation to carry out its vision.

As we commonly see and hear, early stage ventures require specialized services to ensure a strategic business foundation; marketing support to tap target markets and business management experience to augment technical advantages. This foundation will help do this creating a complete package for the region to:

- Support innovators
- Address a service gap need
- Facilitate use of current innovation-based programs
- Accept grants and financial support to advance regional innovation solutions

This foundation will solidify a complete offering providing a powerful advantage to the region’s efforts to build, attract, and retain the technology and innovation jobs of the future.

Timm Boettcher

-EDC Board President and
President of Realityworks

COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

AREA BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

The Area Business Development Committee is gearing up for Business Retention Calls to businesses within our County. The EDC will contact approximately 70 businesses as part of their annual retention effort. The committee is also reviewing Idea Pathway videos and planning an Off the Shelf event. This summer will be dedicated to revamping the Creating Your Own Business Contest for Board approval in September.

BUSINESS RECRUITMENT

The Committee is working on two separate marketing efforts tied to the target industries of computer/electronics and early stage innovation based companies. The campaigns will be implemented in late May to early June.

CRITICAL TALENT

SMARTT Network Update: The EDC staff has met with the SMARTT Network’s program developers and the Critical Talent Committee to determine the next steps to enhance the Web site. Upcoming tasks are focused on updating sections of the site to increase repeat traffic, promote increased user-time on the site, as well as enhanced usability for Subscribers.



A re-design of the Marketplace will allow users to stay up-to-date on western Wisconsin news and view recent job postings, promoting increased traffic and user-time. The streaming of regional information updates from an outside news feed will be the main focus of the “new Marketplace”. The Technology section will also be re-worked to support a more user-friendly layout. While providing technology news and fully explaining how the technologies on the SMARTT Network can be used by customers while also access technical assistance in the region.

Today, Subscribers have the ability to search the SMARTT Talent database to fill open positions. The new updates will allow Subscribers to enter keywords (option not available in the past) similar to search engines to find qualified talent. The implementations of these updates are projected to begin in May with completion in June.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) meetings are being arranged with surrounding higher education institutions (UW-Eau Claire, UW-River Falls, UW-Stout, CVTC, WITC) and Momentum West to update or enter into agreements. In each MOU, both parties will partner to enhance the marketing and outreach efforts of the SMARTT Network talent management solution.

FUNDING & INVESTOR RECRUITMENT

The Funding and Investor Recruitment Committee would like to offer a special “THANKS” to all the investors who participated in the 10% increase for 2010. The committee will continue to actively pursue new private investors to keep our funding levels balanced. Finally, the committee is looking into a location for a Benchmark Community Visit for the EDC to host in the Fall of this year.

CRITICAL CORE MANUFACTURING SKILLS TRAINING – GRANT SUBMITTED TO CUT TRAINING EXPENSE

As the economy recovers and members of the baby boom generation come to the end of their careers the labor needs of our businesses will once again be identified as one of our high priorities. As you all know, demographics and technology are working against finding replacements to do the same job. The next generation of workers will need to be more productive and fully engaged in the business to meet the demands of today's manufacturing environment and global competition.

Most managers and supervisors recognize that the skills required for top producing workers are not uniformly present in their employees. One way to increase employee productivity is to invest in new technologies and processes, but only a fully trained and engaged employee will be able to fully utilize this equipment.

The Critical Core Manufacturing Skills (CCMS) was an outcome of the Wisconsin Technical College System's Advanced Manufacturing Solutions initiative that began in 2003. The CCMS are comprised of 12 identified skills and a training curriculum developed directly from input from Wisconsin manufacturers. Today's manufacturing workplace requires employees at all levels to take initiative to solve problems, work cooperatively in teams, and adapt to an ever-changing environment. The CCMS training program targets these areas and more, to empower your workforce to meet current and future production and customer demands.

Together, the manufacturers of the Chippewa Valley can help ensure a better workforce meet the demands of a global marketplace. CVTC, Chippewa County-EDC Dunn County-EDC and Eau Claire Area-EDC have submitted a joint application for a Workforce Advancement Training (WAT) grant to reduce the cost of this training for participating manufacturers. By creating a training consortium of employers that support the concept of investing in its employees and providing the CCMS training outlined above, there is an excellent chance to reduce training costs while increasing productivity of your workforce. While this application has already been submitted with over 10 businesses pledging support, it is not too late for you to pledge your support.

If interested, please complete the CCMS Pledge of Support form found at www.cvtc.edu/CCMS.

We look forward to your questions and support. Contact Tim Shepardson, CVTC-Chippewa Falls at tshepardson@cvtc.edu 738-3852 or Brian Doudna, Eau Claire Area EDC at 834-0070 brian.doudna@eauclaire-wi.com.

IDEA CHALLENGE PARTNERS MEETING

The EDC held the first Idea Challenge Partners meeting of this year in April. The group met with two clients, both students at UW-Eau Claire. They are moving forward in the process and are eligible for funding through the Bugold fund. The Idea Challenge has had 14 product or business submissions for the first quarter of 2010. For more information on the Idea Challenge, go to our website at www.eauclaire-wi.com and click on Idea Pathway.

VERVE - ROD-N-BOBB'S

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Rod-N-Bobb's is also in the process of entering the Canadian market, which is its first effort at selling internationally. The top selling and newer product lines, like Summer Ice™ and Mr. Ice™, have added the French language to the packaging in order to address customer requirements of the Canadian market. Rod-N-Bobb's will sell its products to general merchandise retailers as well as distributors who will distribute the products to smaller bait shops across the country.

Retail customers account for the majority of sales, but Rod-N-Bobb's is working on growing online sales through its recently updated Web site. The Web site provides retailers and distributors the opportunity to log in and order products and have them delivered right to their stores.

To generate awareness as well as more business, Rod-N-Bobb's is implementing an outbound call center at its facility. Employees will use online research to contact small bait shops to inform them of Rod-N-Bobb's products. Information on these bait shops and their distributors will be gathered for future product launches into additional markets. As a means to build market awareness, Rod-N-Bobb's send product samples to distributors across the country.

For more information about Rod-N-Bobb's, visit the Web site at www.rod-n-bobbs.com.

Investor Advertising Opportunities

Advertise your company on the EDC's Web site (www.eauclaire-wi.com) and in the Area Growth Newsletter!

Need your ad created? We can do that. +\$25
Logo, content, and other graphics must be supplied.

Pricing

For a limited time, all advertisements on the EDC Web site are **\$50/month**.

WHAT???

Yep. Just **\$50/month!**
And this price is only available to our investors, so take advantage of it while it lasts!

**To advertise, contact
Gwen Schuppel**

Phone: 715-834-0070
Email: gwen.schuppel@eauclaire-wi.com



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