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West Virginia Company 'Putting Out Fires' In The Business World

PHILIPPI - The National Institute of Health (NIH) recently awarded a \$100,000 Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) grant to Extreme Endeavors and Consulting to conduct research and development of an innovative firefighter suit.

Extreme Endeavors and Consulting is a small business located in Philippi, WV, whose president, Mike Masterman began in 1998 to produce and develop equipment for hazardous and austere environments.

Masterman was assisted in his pursuit of the NIH funding with a \$5000 grant from the West Virginia Small Business Development Research and Commercialization program that enabled him to draft his proposal for the firefighter suit.

The lightweight suit is designed with sensor technology which permits constant contact with other firefighters, aids in locating victims in poor visibility conditions and features the Electronic Lifeline, which monitors and transmits vital signs to an operation base.

“The unique capabilities of Extreme Endeavors, combined with the support received from the West Virginia Small Business Development Center at Fairmont, allowed us to begin this project,” said Masterman.

Masterman tested and evaluated the firefighter suit and Electronic Lifeline at the West Virginia University Fire Service Extension in Morgantown. The successful initial testing of the suit enabled Extreme Endeavors to submit a second proposal to NIH for up to \$750,000 to develop a working prototype.

Adventure and excitement are nothing new to Masterman. In addition to working several years as a firefighter and EMT at various locations throughout the country, he served as science coordinator and manager of the Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station. During his tenure, he organized and coordinated the first emergency medical air drop in the history of the South Pole to assist Dr. Jeri Neilson, who was diagnosed with breast cancer during her commission which received world-wide attention.

In addition to receiving the SBIR grant, Extreme Endeavors is also registered as a HUB-Zone certified company and received assistance and counseling from the U.S. Small Business Administrations West Virginia District Office when applying for listing on the GSA schedule.

“Mike came to the SBA looking for assistance to get his company on the GSA schedule,” said Sharon Weaver, Economic Development Specialist at the SBA. “I provided him some information and encouraged him to visit the SBDC and PTAC as well as register to attend the Teaming To Win conference.”

The SBIR program is a highly competitive program that encourages small business to explore their technological potential and provides the incentive to profit from its commercialization. By including qualified small businesses in the nation's R&D arena, high-tech innovation is stimulated and the United States gains entrepreneurial spirit as it meets its specific research and development needs.

SBIR targets the entrepreneurial sector because that is where most innovation and innovators thrive. However, the risk and expense of conducting serious R&D efforts are often beyond the means of many small businesses. By reserving a specific percentage of federal R&D funds for small business, SBIR protects the small business and enables it to compete on the same level as larger businesses. SBIR funds the critical startup and development stages and it encourages the commercialization of the technology, product, or service, which, in turn, stimulates the U.S. economy.

The HUBZone Empowerment Contracting program was enacted into law as part of the Small Business Reauthorization Act of 1997. The program falls under the auspices of the US Small Business Administration. The program encourages economic development in historically underutilized business zones - "HUBZones" - through the establishment of preferences.

SBA's HUBZone program is in line with the efforts of both the Administration and Congress to promote economic development and employment growth in distressed areas by providing access to more Federal contracting opportunities.

Extreme Endeavors develops new technology for clients such as NASA and Lucent Technologies. Masterman also works under a cooperative research and development agreement with the Natick Soldier Center, an organization of the U.S. Army Soldier and Biological Chemical Command, to develop a land warrior suit.

For additional information on the programs and services offered by the SBA and their resource partners, contact the West Virginia District Office at 1-800-767-8052 ext. 8 or by email at wvinfo@sba.gov. You can also visit their web site at www.sba.gov/wv.

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