



opportunityreturns

Creating more jobs for today and tomorrow

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Rod R. Blagojevich – Governor

news

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

January 26, 2006

CONTACTS:

Cheryle Jackson	312.814.3158 (office)
Abby Ottenhoff	312/814.3158 (office)
Rebecca Rausch	217/782.7355 (office)
Gerardo Cardenas	312/814.3158 (office)
Andrew Ross	312/814.8193 (DCEO)

GOV. BLAGOJEVICH ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF HOMELAND SECURITY BUSINESS PLAN CONTEST IN ROCK RIVER VALLEY

\$12,500 in Challenge Grants Awarded to Two Winning Teams

CHICAGO - Building on his commitment to creating jobs and growing the economic by making Illinois a leader of innovation and product development in the homeland security industry, Gov. Rod R. Blagojevich today announced \$12,500 in entrepreneurial challenge grants to help support this growing industry in Northern Illinois. As co-winners of the Homeland Security Business Plan Contest, Roc-net Holdings, LLC, in partnership with Prairie Shield, will receive a \$7,500 award and MCJ, Inc. will receive \$5,000 in funding from the Rock River Valley Entrepreneurship Center (RRVEC) and the Homeland Security Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center (HSIEC) at Northwestern University. Both centers are part of the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity's (DCEO) Illinois Entrepreneurship Network (IEN). An awards committee comprised of representatives from the RRVEC, HSIEC and DCEO judged entries. RRVEC Director Daniel Cataldi presented the winners with their awards today in Rockford.

"We are committed to supporting emerging companies engaged in the homeland security industry," said Gov. Blagojevich. "In helping these companies bring their products to market, we are also establishing Illinois as a leading center for the development and production of homeland security goods and services and creating more jobs across the state."

Rockford area companies and entrepreneurs were invited to submit a homeland security business plan that would stimulate creative, innovative business development in Northern Illinois.

Rockford-based ROC-net and Prairie Shield will work together to create a comprehensive, large transmission bandwidth infrastructure in Boone and Ogle counties supporting an 'interoperable' wireless communication network for emergency services and first responder personnel. The network will support 'real-time' use of digital voice, data, and video information with any authorized user in an emergency response setting. By combining the ROC-net network with product application of Prairie Shield, emergency management personnel will have the ability to share information across multiple locations, environments, networks and technologies.

MCJ, Inc., also in Rockford, will receive a \$5,000 challenge grant and work with the RRVEC and HSIEC to develop a comprehensive strategic marketing, sales and branding plan in order to further commercialize its "EyeCheck™" pupillometer. This field deployable product uses pupil measurements in order to detect for the presence of chemical or biological elements in humans.

(more)

“Gov. Blagojevich and I are very pleased by the number of businesses and entrepreneurs from in and around the Rock River Valley who submitted homeland security business plans,” said DCEO Director Jack Lavin. “This competition has been a very successful competition to demonstrate the Northern Illinois business community’s high level of interest in the homeland security market.”

An event was held today at RRVEC’s EIGERlab to announce the winners. All 11 contestants who submitted applications had the opportunity to present and display their business plans for a homeland security product or service.

The winners of the business competition have also been invited to apply for an additional grant award through the Homeland Security Market Development Bureau’s Innovative Product Grant (IPG) program, which provides up to \$150,000 in funding (with a dollar-for-dollar private capital match) to directly catalyze the commercialization, improvement and production of goods and services with an application in homeland security and a dual use in another sector. IPG funds are intended to help generate employment growth and produce economic activity in Illinois by helping companies complete milestone projects that are either ready-for-market or in the later stages of development and can be developed, produced, commercialized or delivered from Illinois.

The Rock River Valley Entrepreneurship Center is designed to act as a regional hub that coordinates all small business development, entrepreneurship training and development activity across the region, and provides entrepreneurs with the tools they need to make their ventures successful. The Illinois Entrepreneurship Network also includes a partnership with economic development centers across Illinois funded by DCEO, including the Small Business Environmental Assistance program, Small Business Development Centers (SBDC), Procurement Technical Assistance Centers (PTAC), International Trade Centers (ITC), NAFTA Opportunity Centers (NOC), Illinois Technology Enterprise Centers (ITEC) and Illinois Manufacturing Extension Centers (IMEC). There is also an IEN Web site, www.ienconnect.com, featuring a free business needs assessment and a referral within 24 hours for personalized, face-to-face assistance. Entrepreneurs, who call toll-free to the IEN information center (800-252-2923), can also connect with service representatives who will assess their business concerns and direct them to the local resources that best meet their needs.

For more information about HSIEC, please visit www.homelandsecurityiec.org.

DCEO’s Homeland Security Market Development Bureau (HSMD) is focused on supporting businesses engaged in the homeland security industry. HSMD offers a variety of investment tools designed to help existing Illinois companies expand operations and utilize available state and federal programs and services. Among its efforts, the Bureau has supported Illinois businesses with employee training to keep pace with new technologies and skills, held CEO roundtables to engage business leaders about the state’s ongoing role in the post-9/11 world, and hosted market development forums featuring national experts for Illinois businesses. For more information on HSMD, visit www.hsmd.illinois.gov.

Gov. Blagojevich’s *Opportunity Returns* regional economic development strategy is the most aggressive, comprehensive approach to creating jobs in Illinois’ history. Since a one-size-fits-all approach to economic development just doesn’t work, the Governor has divided the state into 10 regions – each with a regional team that is empowered and expected to rapidly respond to opportunities and challenges. *Opportunity Returns* is about tangible, specific actions to make each region more accessible, more marketable, more entrepreneurial and more attractive to businesses. It is about upgrading the skills of the local workforce, increasing the access to capital, opening new markets, improving infrastructure, and creating and retaining jobs. *Opportunity Returns* is about successfully partnering with companies and communities, both large and small, to help all of Illinois reach its economic potential.

#####

