

Incubator seeks tenants as grads leave the nest

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W. Marc Bernsau Photo

John Miller, director of the University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth's business incubator, said his facility is considering applications from a number of new companies.

The University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth's business incubator is scouting for new tenants after the recent graduation of its two largest companies.

Micro-Ant Inc., an antenna manufacturer, and Mikel Inc., a woman-owned business that develops underwater warfare tools, both moved out the Applied Technology and Manufacturing Center, UMass Dartmouth's incubator program, at the end of the year. The pair of companies occupied about 35 percent of the incubator's 10,000 square feet of space and represented 27 jobs and \$2.5 million in salaries.

"We've been lucky so far having companies that continually grow," said John Miller director of the Fall River-based program.

The incubator, which just reached the end of a three-year cycle of nurturing new businesses, according to Miller, now houses six companies, down from 14 last year. The facility is considering applications from six new companies.

Launched in 2001, the nonprofit center for technology-based companies has helped launch six startups since its inception.

The center offers fledgling companies inexpensive rent for office space, broadband and conference rooms, access to faculty and to student interns and use of the university's specialized labs, including photonics, microbiology, textiles and materials and prototyping labs. Rents range from \$200 per month for a locking cubicle to \$700 for 450 square feet.

Charles McCarrick initially ran his antenna-manufacturing company, Micro-Ant Inc., from the basement of his home in Plymouth, then from about 2,000 square feet of space in the UMass center.

During its two years there, the company found success making antennas for Sirius Satellite Radio (Nasdaq: SIRI). In December, Micro-Ant moved to 8,000 square feet of space in Easton. Bootstrapped from the beginning, the company did about \$3 million in revenue in 2006.

“The Building allowed us access to a lot of resources that we would not have been available to us on a budget, such as the machine shop. We were able to prototype a lot of our early products quickly and economically.” Said McCarrick.

Inherently, you don’t think to start a high-tech business in a Fall River or a Lawrence, and from a healthy economy perspective, that’s exactly where you’d want them to be,” said Tim Rowe, CEO of the Cambridge Innovation Center, a for-profit business incubator in Cambridge that houses 150 businesses.

“It’s so challenging if you’re in a blighted community,” he said.

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