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**GOV. BLAGOJEVICH ANNOUNCES \$190,000 IN GRANTS TO HELP FOUR  
HIGH-GROWTH, TECH-BASED FIRMS ADVANCE  
COMMERCIALIZATION EFFORTS IN THE CHICAGOLAND AREA**

***Innovation Challenge Grant Program Matched Critical Federal Research and  
Development Dollars for Firms in Cook, Lake and Will Counties***

CHICAGO – In his continuing efforts to support technology-driven enterprises, Gov. Rod R. Blagojevich today announced \$190,000 in *Opportunity Returns* grants to four Chicagoland technology-based firms to help these companies advance commercialization efforts and grow their businesses. American BioOptics in Evanston, MicroLink Devices in Niles, QuesTek Innovations in Evanston and Advanced Diamond Technologies in Romeoville all received funding through the federally-administered Small Business Innovation and Research (SBIR) program, which these dollars helped to match. This support comes as a part of *Opportunity Returns*, the Governor’s pro-active, comprehensive economic development strategy designed to create even more jobs and spur continued growth throughout the region.

“Illinois is filled with world-class research and promising new technologies, but, in order to successfully translate this research into viable ventures, companies need access to the critical dollars to get there. By investing in innovative, high-growth companies like these four Chicagoland firms, we are helping them leverage vital federal contracts that will turn cutting-edge research into successful new products. We will continue creating a business environment that encourages innovation, so emerging firms can access the resources they need to build their businesses and create even more high-paying jobs,” Gov. Blagojevich said.

**American BioOptics**, an Evanston-based medical diagnostics company, is receiving a **\$50,000** grant. The company is commercializing two innovative optical backscattering technologies developed at Northwestern University and Evanston Northwestern Healthcare for the purpose of early detection of colorectal cancer. In the long-term, this project aims to develop and commercialize an optical technology for colon cancer screening in a simple, inexpensive, and minimally invasive test that would forego need for bowel cleansing. Colon cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in the U.S. largely because only a small fraction of the eligible population undergoes a screening colonoscopy. (Contact: Andrew Cittadine, CEO – 847/467.0628).

**MicroLink Devices**, a Niles-based ISO-9001 semiconductor manufacturing company providing specialized high performance GaAs (gallium arsenide) based semiconductors, is receiving a **\$50,000** grant to develop a low-cost manufacturing process for high efficiency and high specific power solar array technology. The high performance GaAs based semiconductors are currently being used as power amplifiers in cellular phones and RF (radio frequency) test equipment.

MicroLink has developed state-of-the-art gallium arsenide based semiconductors for RF amplifiers with the highest efficiency and reliability performance. As part of the Phase I SBIR, this technology will be extended to provide high conversion efficiency and cost effective solar cells for terrestrial concentrator systems in addition to high specific power density for space applications. This project is expected to create two new jobs and retain three others. (Contact: Dr. Noren Pan – 847/588.3001).

**QuesTek Innovations LLC**, an Evanston-based materials solutions company that computationally designs new alloys per customer specifications, is receiving an almost **\$40,000** grant. The company, which was born out of research at Northwestern University, has worked with the U.S. Air Force for the past six years designing, developing, and qualifying for flight a new alloy for Air Force landing gear. QuesTek is now in the final portion of this effort and has signed its first license agreement with a specialty steel maker to supply the Air Force with the new alloy moving forward. QuesTek received this state grant to match funds provided by the U.S. Navy targeting the design and development of similar steel: a low-cost, high-strength, high-fracture-tough, corrosion-resistant metal alloy for use in Naval landing gear. (Contact: Brian Tufts – 847/425.8241).

**Advanced Diamond Technologies, Inc.** (ADT), a Romeoville-based nanotechnology company formed in December 2003 to commercialize diamond technology from Argonne National Laboratory, is receiving a **\$50,000** grant. This SBIR Phase I project will advance the development of foundry-quality MEMS (micro-electromechanical systems) wafers made from diamond—ushering in the era of diamond MEMS. Diamond MEMS have great promise in RF devices (resonators, filters, oscillators for wireless communications), bio-implantable chips (artificial retina, cochlear implants, implantable ID chips), electronics and material research (AFM probes, data storage devices, x-ray and electron optics) and sensors (SAW sensors, vibrating cantilever sensors, etc). This project is expected to create two new jobs and retain three others. ADT, which has secured over \$1 million in SBIR grants, has also received \$140,000 from DCEO's Innovative Product Grant (IPG) program, the nation's first state-funded grant program focused on developing products to meet homeland security needs. (Contact: Neil Kane – 815/293.0900).

This funding comes from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity's (DCEO) Innovation Challenge Matching Grant program, which is designed to help companies across various technology sectors tap into federal contracts, like the Small Business Innovation and Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) programs, to develop technologies that can lead to commercial products. The Governor committed \$1 million toward this program, which provides an up to 50 percent match on federal funding to assist with technology development and commercialization efforts.

SBIR and STTR provide early-stage R&D funding directly to small technology companies or individual entrepreneurs across the country developing leading-edge technologies of interest to eleven federal departments and agencies. Companies apply first for a phase I award of up to \$100,000 to test the scientific, technical, and commercial merit and feasibility of a particular concept. If phase I proves successful, the company may be invited to apply for a two-year phase II award of up to \$750,000 to further develop the concept, usually to the prototype stage. As

such, these programs provide seed capital of up to \$850,000 to develop technologies that can lead to commercial products. The Innovation Challenge Matching Grant program helps to assist Illinois companies in receiving SBIR/STTR contracts, while increasing their attractiveness to acquire additional investment.

“As we keep building our regional economy, it’s important that the necessary resources are available for our young, tech-based businesses, especially when it’s a matter of vital early stage dollars that can make or break a promising new venture. My thanks to Gov. Blagojevich for stepping up to address this need, which is helping these innovative companies develop new products and move new technologies into the marketplace,” said State Senator Jeff Schoenberg (D-Evanston).

“The Governor’s Innovation Challenge Program is an excellent complement to the federal SBIR programs to better help high-growth companies secure technologies or market products. By investing in new technologies and cutting-edge research, we are better positioning the region for greater economic growth,” said State Senator Ira Silverstein (D-Chicago).

“I commend Gov. Blagojevich for establishing the Innovation Challenge Program, which is helping to increase tech transfer opportunities for more high growth Illinois firms like Advanced Diamond Technologies. We will continue to work together with our growing companies to help them create more jobs and expand their presence in the region,” said State Senator A.J. Whilelmi (D-Joliet).

“In order to translate cutting-edge research into commercial products, we must help nurture our growing tech-based firms, which will only lead to more good jobs. Northwestern University is one of the world’s top research institutions and American BioOptics and QuesTek Innovations are prime examples of why we need to invest in important new technologies. Gov. Blagojevich and I will continue to lend our support behind these innovative ventures,” said State Representative Julie Hamos (D-Evanston).

“This type of funding is a lifeline for companies to develop bold new technologies and position their products for success in the marketplace. Gov. Blagojevich has created a program that is going a long way to help advance our high-growth, tech-based firms and create more good-paying jobs,” said State Representative John D’Amico (D-Chicago).

Gov. Blagojevich also created the Innovation Challenge Technical Assistance program to increase the number of SBIR/STTR applications in Illinois through assistance with the proposal writing process. DCEO is working in partnership with the Champaign County Economic Development Commission and the Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) to perform SBIR/STTR-related proposal writing and assistance services for technology-based entrepreneurs, innovators and new venture start-ups to access federal funding opportunities, driving technology-based job creation and economic development.

“Gov. Blagojevich and I strongly believe that in order to create more good jobs we must be strategic about providing our young, tech-driven firms with the resources they need to develop into economically viable and sustainable companies. These four companies are prime examples

of growing, high-tech firms that are in need of these critical early stage dollars to position them for long-term success. Through initiatives like the Innovation Challenge Matching Grant Program, we will continue the state's progress to further develop a vibrant tech industry throughout the region and statewide," DCEO Director Jack Lavin said.

Since January 2004, Illinois has gained more than 186,000 jobs, which is best in the Midwest. Illinois led the nation in new job growth in January with 19,100 new jobs and in June of this year with 12,400 new jobs. In 2006, Illinois gained 71,000 new jobs, which is the best calendar year gain since 2000. Over the last 4 years, from January 2003 to December 2006, Illinois had the second largest unemployment rate drop in the nation. The federal Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Illinois Department of Employment Security compiled these statistics.

For more information about the program, contact Scott Henkel in the Technology and Industrial Competitiveness Bureau at DCEO, **217/557.6880** or [scott.henkel@illinois.gov](mailto:scott.henkel@illinois.gov).