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Showcase: Crossing the economic bridge

By Jeff Crooke

Companies are building relationships across Virginia's length and breadth to the benefit of all. Tech Nite is one of the Blue Ridge Region's showcase technology events, and I'll have more about it in my next column, but it's important to recognize the number and diversity of such events in the Commonwealth. One successful venture held by the Virginia Economic Bridge (VEB) is Virginia's Linked Workforce Showcase.

Each year since 2003 the VEB has sponsored this event, which brings together technology-related businesses from the southwest corner of the state with businesses from Northern Virginia and encourages them to network, display their strengths, and form valuable alliances that have the potential to create jobs in both areas while keeping lucrative contracts in the Commonwealth. This year nine companies from the southwest and 16 from Northern Virginia participated.

The companies from our area were Automation Creations, Blacksburg; Business Knowledge Architects, Roanoke; CornerPost Software, Duffield; G3 Systems, Roanoke; Highland Data Services Company, Blue Grass; Integrated Imaging, Roanoke; Interactive Design, Roanoke; Interactive Design & Development, Blacksburg; and Vision Point Systems, Blacksburg. The NOVA companies were Advance Technology Systems; AT&T Government Solutions; Base Technologies; CGI-AMS; CSC; GTSI; ifour, LLC; INDUS; Lockheed Martin; Mitretek Systems; CALIBRE; Integrated Systems; SAIC; SRA International; UNISYS; and Stanley Associates.

The results of linking these businesses are impressive. Thompson + Litton, engineers, architects and planners, are based in Tazewell with offices in Wise, Radford, Clintonwood and Bristol, Tenn. It solidified a strategic partnership with Centex Construction Company, which offers home building, contracting and construction services, construction products and financial services. Centex is based in Dallas, with offices in Fairfax.

Datalink Systems Inc. operates out of the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center. It specializes in business analysis, activity-based costing, complete application development, decision support systems, and management. Consultants created an alliance with Vienna-based Macronetics, which specializes in Business Process Management (BPM) solutions, workflow software products and professional services. "It opened a lot of horizons," says Datalink's Harinder Sarao.

"We made excellent contacts at the Virginia's Linked Workforce Showcase that we are looking forward to pursuing. My peers attending this event agree that this was the best event of its type," says Automation Creations President Henry Bass in a press release following the event.

"The Showcases have proven to be outstanding successes in bringing people from different regions together to create strategic partnerships that connect the state technologically, economically and culturally," says Carl Mitchell, president and CEO of Virginia Economic Bridge. "This is positive outsourcing for Virginia; companies don't have to leave the state to find outstanding talent and value for their contracts." Mitchell hopes to grow the event, too. "Our goal in 2005 is to host a total of three showcases in NOVA and then work on hosting one a quarter in NOVA in 2006. We will then move forward to hosting a NOVA company here in [the Blue Ridge Region] every other month starting in 2006."

Aside from the contracts and networking alliances the program forges, the most important success story it may claim is helping to break down the perception that SWVA is a region bereft of tech savvy. The success of Tech's Corporate Research Center and other area companies, the hard work of regional entities like the VEB and NewVa Corridor Technology Council, combined with events such as the Showcase and Tech Nite, are turning Virginia's best-kept tech secret into public knowledge.

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