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Contact: Kevin DiGregorio, Executive Director, Chemical Alliance Zone,
kevindig@suddenlink.net, 304-746-1964

Grants will support commercialization efforts of West Virginia startups and entrepreneurs

SOUTH CHARLESTON, W.Va. – The Chemical Alliance Zone’s Chemicals and Materials (CAM) Commercialization Fund has awarded grants to three West Virginia-based companies to help bring new technologies to market.

Liberty Hydro Inc. was awarded \$20,000 for a portable water-filtration pilot unit needed for customer-site demonstrations of Liberty Hydro’s clean-water technology. Liberty Hydro, a spinoff of the Mid-Atlantic Technology and Research Innovation Center (MATRIC) and located at the West Virginia Regional Technology Park (WVRTP), uses its proprietary technology to develop water purification systems for industry.

Vandalia Research Inc. was awarded \$18,220 for an analytical system that will help the company commercialize a key product and achieve important industry certification and compliance. Vandalia is a biotechnology company and a spinout from Marshall University that is located in Huntington, WV. The company’s Triathlon DNA production technology allows for the large-scale production of DNA.

Keen Process Technologies LLC was awarded \$15,000 for proof-of-concept studies and intellectual property protection for a new, green process to make acrylic acid, a key raw material used in the production of various plastics, coatings, and other materials, including diaper products. Keen Process Technologies is located at the WVRTP.

Dr. Kevin DiGregorio, executive director of the Chemical Alliance Zone, said, “We are excited about all three companies and technologies, and we’re pleased the CAM Fund is being used to boost commercialization efforts for some of West Virginia’s startup companies and entrepreneurs. That is exactly what it was designed to do.”

DiGregorio said the CAM Commercialization Fund assists researchers, entrepreneurs, startup companies and small-to-medium firms with the commercialization of technology and products related to the chemicals and materials sectors in West Virginia. Funds are provided through a grant to TechConnect West Virginia from the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation. The Chemical Alliance Zone administers the program with the assistance of an advisory group made up of representatives from the INNOVA Commercialization Group, Mountaineer Capital, the West Virginia Angel Network and the West Virginia Jobs Investment Trust.

Dr. John Taylor, Chief Technology Officer for Liberty Hydro, said, “This is already helping us in a big way. We’ve been able to place the new unit at industrial sites to directly demonstrate the technology. This will help us sell the technology and sell new units.”

Similarly, the award to Vandalia will enable faster commercialization of the company’s technology. “Right now, our procedures for DNA cleanup and quality control are a bit cumbersome and time consuming,” Derek Gregg, CEO of Vandalia, said. “This award will help us not only speed that up but make it much more efficient, using the same instrument for several needs.”

DiGregorio said the three awards illustrate the broad scope of the CAM Fund. “One award went to an established but small biotech firm, one went to an established clean-water startup, and the third went to an entrepreneur to test a new, green process to manufacture a widely available, high-volume chemical.

That entrepreneur, Dr. Brian Keen, is a former process chemist for Union Carbide and Dow Chemical. He has 25 patents and a long history of discovering, developing and implementing new technologies and products.

“In fact, the next time you step on your brakes, you can probably thank Brian,” DiGregorio said. “There is a good chance Brian developed the formulation for the brake fluid in your car.”

Keen is thankful for the grant and the opportunity to develop a new process at the WVRTP. “This grant allows us to evaluate the technology very cost effectively,” he said. “It has a good chance of leading to more development work too. This is a process that could have a big impact if it works.”

For more information about Liberty Hydro, visit www.libertyhydro.com.

For more information about Vandalia Research, visit www.vandaliaresearch.com.

For more information about the CAM Commercialization Fund, contact DiGregorio at (304) 437-4295.