



NONA COMPOSITES, SOIN AWARD WINNER, SHOWS OFF SKILLS AT NUCLEAR SPILL SITE

Beavercreek company delivers key tool under tight deadline

– By: Vince McKelvey

A year ago, the U.S. Department of Energy was dealing with a spill of nuclear waste at an underground storage facility in New Mexico. A 55-gallon drum of contaminated material had burst open and the DoE needed to assess the damage. It wanted a beam that could carry a camera and sensors over the area without stirring up contaminated dust – and it wanted it in a hurry.

NONA Composites of Beavercreek – working with its sister company Advantic and their parent, the Cornerstone Research Group – was able to fill the bill, thanks in large part to a fast-curing resin that needs no oven and no autoclave – hence, NONA – to set up.

“They came to us and said can you build a composite beam that’s 90 feet long; that can extend over a waste stack; it can carry a camera; it can’t deflect at all – you can’t hit the waste ... and, oh by the way, can you do it in six weeks?” said Mike Rauscher, PhD, NONA’s chief technology officer and director of Cornerstone’s research center.

Six weeks seemed a stretch. The local group offered to do it in eight.

“They had been used to hearing, we’ll do it in three months, or we’ll do it in six months or no, we can’t do it,” Rauscher said. “But because we had NONA we were able to dramatically reduce the time it takes to make the tooling.”

In fact, seven weeks later, the beam and camera caddy system designed and built by NONA Composites, Cornerstone Research, Advantic was ready to go. NONA’s beam comprised 12 sections that were light enough to be hand-carried and engineered to be assembled by workers in full protective gear a half-mile underground. When put together, the beam could be fully extended without bending more than six inches at the tip. “That’s pretty darn stiff,” Rauscher said.

SOIN AWARD WINNER

NONA Composites is this year’s recipient of the Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce’s Soin Award for Innovation. The award, created in 2007 and named for its sponsor, local entrepreneur Rajesh Soin, recognizes a company with a unique product that exemplifies the region’s tradition of innovation and entrepreneurship.

It carries a \$25,000 prize – no small matter when a company is less than two years old. “We’re still a very small business and every dollar counts,” said NONA Composites President Ben Dietsch said. “This award has helped us go a long way in being able to continue to reach out from a sales and marketing perspective and do some internal product development.”

NONA Composites, LLC, spun off of Cornerstone Research in late 2013 and remains a Cornerstone subsidiary. Cornerstone, founded in 1997, does contract research with an eye toward commercializing the most promising new products through spin-off subsidiaries. Patrick Hood, the president and CEO at Cornerstone, is also CEO at NONA Composites and Advantic.

Dietsch said NONA Composites benefitted from five years of research and development at Cornerstone – some of it funded through NASA’s Small Business Innovative Research program – that allowed it to “basically hit the ground running in January of 2014.”

NONA Composites currently consists of five people including the three principals, Hood, Dietsch and Rauscher. It’s on track to reach \$1.5 million in sales this year, Dietsch said.

The five-year goal is to have 20 to 30 employees and upwards of \$40 million in annual sales. “I think we’re in the traditional new start-up path, where it’s slow for a while and then hopefully things start to really take off as market-acceptance gains steam,” he said.

The company has three product units: it makes and sells resin, manufactures composite tools and parts, and offers engineering services related to its products and processes.

NONA Composite’s resin is the foundation.