

Michigan Security Network Ramps Up

Michigan's drive to create a viable homeland security industry got a huge lift in August when Leslie Touma announced the startup of the Michigan Security Network, a nonprofit group focused on growing the state's cyber security, border security and bio-defense businesses.

Armed with reams of favorable research generated by Washington, D.C.-based Civitas Group LLC, Touma identified Michigan's strengths and the opportunities those strengths could offer Michigan businesses, confident that "Michigan will become known for homeland security."

The state's case is "pretty simple ... and compelling," says Mark Sheehan, managing director of Civitas. "We think that this is absolutely doable," he says, citing Michigan's solid resources, including: superior academic institutions; highly skilled and educated workforce (notably in engineering and technology); geographic location; significant R&D funding; and politically well-connected senators and congressmen.

Civitas, which specializes in homeland security work to the private sector and government clients, provided a strategic analysis of the Michigan economy. As a result, says Touma, a metro Detroit native, "We really started looking at where the gaps are in the field and how we can fill those gaps using our strengths. We need to think strategically about the larger sectors we want to develop."

The network has an ambitious agenda. It plans to facilitate spinout companies, lure large homeland security businesses to Michigan, help existing large companies refocus their products and services, retain educated workers, build a comprehensive homeland security database and leverage its market research, expertise and business networks to bring funding and investment into the state.

The network is composed of 16 companies, universities and other organizations that provided initial seed money last year. The New Economy Initiative of Southeastern Michigan — a \$100-million regional initiative to create jobs — approved a \$150,000 grant for the organization in July.

Touma says the network is the inevitable culmination of her 25 years of work experience. She served as a nuclear policy analyst for the U.S. Department of Defense from 1984 to 1991; was a member of the U.S. Strategic Arms Control Delegation in Geneva, Switzerland; and served at the U.S. Mission to NATO in Brussels, Belgium.

She also served as a policy advisor on international trade to former Michigan Governor John Engler and later executive director of the Michigan International Trade Coalition that promoted passage of the NAFTA.

The homeland security market is \$113 billion, including about \$42 billion from Congress and the rest from the private sector. With the lion's share of the grants going to California, New York state and Virginia, Touma has communicated with the under secretary in the Department of Homeland Security and individuals in the Defense Department about Michigan's strengths and opportunities for funding.

Michigan Security Network is sponsoring a conference Nov. 4 at the Hyatt Regency in Dearborn, bringing in national leaders in cyber security, border security and bio-terrorism. Visit www.michigansecuritynetwork.com for more information.

>> industry in Michigan," Lott said at a press conference announcing the coup. The company picked Port Huron to test its technology because it is an area that has aspects of what the government is trying to do to protect its international roadways, bridges, waterways and tunnels.

Michigan provides many challenges the government likes, Lott says, such as extremes in weather conditions (wind, rain, snow, sleet and sun); international crossings that need enhancing and faster inspection efficiencies in a less intrusive way; and the general confluence of people, utilities, trains, ships, cars, trucks, planes, gas storage, fresh water sourcing, bridges, tunnels, major highways, airports, seaports and recreational/tourism traffic.

Lott envisions Port Huron being a hub for similar technology. "These are jobs for thinkers," he says, adding that he has more than "100 potential clients" waiting to meet with him.

The MEDC recently named Col. James Braden as Lott's replacement. Lott said he will continue to do contract work with the state.

FRUITFUL OPERATIONS

Michigan's defense contract recruitment continues to bear fruit. In August, the federal government announced that it would build a northern border data collection center at Selfridge Air National Guard Base in Harrison Township to fight cross-border crime.

The \$30 million Operational Integration Center, scheduled to open in May 2010, is the first on the U.S.-Canadian border, the government says. It will analyze and act on aircraft video, border camera images and other data from federal, state and local agencies, similar to what comparable centers now do on the U.S.-Mexican border.

Last year alone, thanks in part to efforts by the MEDC:

- Defense manufacturer Advanced Defense Vehicle Systems began expanding at its location in Orion Township, where the company develops armored trucks.
- Armored vehicle contractor BAE Systems announced plans for a \$58.4-million expansion at an undetermined site in the Sterling Heights area.
- General Dynamics Land Systems, a manufacturer of military armored vehicles in Macomb County, >>