Innovations earn member companies a Connecticut Quality Improvement Award

Application deadline for this year's awards is March 26

Electro Energy Inc., in Danbury, overcame an edge seal problem that has plagued rechargeable bipolar battery designs.

Farmington-based Otis Elevator Co. met the challenge posed by a competitor's product that threatened to steal Otis' market share.

Packard BioScience Co., in Meriden, invented a technology that lets life-science researchers accurately dispense minute quantities (less than one-billionth of a liter) of DNA or proteins onto substrates used to create "biochips."

These companies (all CBIA members) saw problems as opportunities and responded with innovations that won them a Platinum-level Connecticut Innovation Award in 2001 from the Connecticut Quality Improvement Award (CQIA) Partnership. Other companies received Gold or Silver awards.

Award-winning innovations

Electro Energy's innovative bipolar nickel-metal hydride (Ni-MH) battery is 25% smaller, 20% lighter and over 50% more powerful than other Ni-MH technologies. And they're maintenance-free. All of which has caught the attention of the U.S. Navy and Air Force, which have awarded Electro Energy $2 million to develop products for military aircraft. Automotive companies are interested in the technology, too, for use in hybrid electric vehicles.

Otis Elevator realized a competitor's introduction of an elevator that didn't need a separate machine room could edge Otis out of an important business sector. It needed to come up with a new concept for machine-roomless elevators that wouldn't infringe on its competitor's patent. Otis engineers developed a system that replaced traditional steel cables with flat, polyurethane-coated steel belts — the first innovation in lifting technology in more than a century.

Incorporating the belts into Otis' Gen2™ elevator system eliminates the need for a separate machine room. The system also has environmental advantages because it uses less energy and reduces oil-based wastes. And the belts are 20% lighter and last two to three times longer than the traditional cables.

Packard BioScience's innovation also vastly improves on traditional methods. Its technology (PiezoTipnology™) is similar to an inkjet printer, only instead of ink on paper, thousands of biomolecules are deposited on a glass, plastic or electronic substrate. The resulting biochips are used to test biological substances. Packard's technology enables up to 1,600 biological test sites per square centimeter. Packard is the only company to win two Platinum CQIA awards.

Goal: A Connecticut Baldrige winner by 2005

The Connecticut Innovation Award, granted to worthy businesses, nonprofits, educational or government entities, recognizes achievements and innovations during the first stages of the "quality journey." It's the first of three award levels available from the Connecticut Quality Improvement Award Partnership, founded in 1987. The other awards are the mid-level Connecticut Breakthrough Quality Award, a bare-bones version of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award criteria and processes, and the top-level Connecticut Leadership Quality Award, which involves the complete Baldrige process.

According to Sheila Carmine, CQIA founder and president, no state company has yet won the prestigious national award. So the partnership's goal is the "First Baldrige Winner from Connecticut by the Year 2005."

Companies wishing to apply for this year's Connecticut Innovation Award must do so by March 26. For more information, call CQIA at 203-322-9534 or visit www.ctqualityaward.com. ■

Office of BioScience

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information technology strengths. Dubbed the "hot spot" campaign, it will send the message to bioscience and information technology companies across the country that they belong in Connecticut.

"As the firms that are already here will tell you, Connecticut is a remarkable location for bioscience and information technology companies. We have educated and innovative workers, venture capital, a business-friendly government, and a strategic location between Boston and New York," says Gov. Rowland.

Both sectors continue to exhibit strong growth in the state. Information technology is the fastest-growing sector of Connecticut's economy, while bioscience research and development expenditures here have grown to more than $3 billion annually. ■