

'Basically, it's a David and Goliath story'

■ Company beats out giant competitors for contract.

BY JOHN DAYBERRY

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HICKORY

A small, Hickory-based company edged out some of the biggest names in the fiber optic test equipment industry to land a U.S. Air Force contract.

"Basically, it's a David and Goliath story," said Sean Pons, director of engineering for OptiConcepts Inc.

"We're very proud of this, very excited," he said.

OptiConcepts, founded in 2000, was recently awarded a contract to supply the U.S. Air Force with 21 optical time domain reflectometers.

The sophisticated instruments are designed to test,

DETAILS

Company: OptiConcepts Inc.

Type: Designer and manufacturer of fiber optic test equipment

Founded: 2000

Principals: Christine Pons, Sean Pons and Dr. Stanley Pons

Employees: Six

Location: 925B Old Lenoir Road, NW

Phone: (828) 320-0138

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monitor and trouble-shoot the health of fiber optic systems. By firing laser pulses down an optical fiber system, an optical time domain reflectometer can detect signal loss up to 125 miles.

The initial contract is worth \$167,000, and the Air Force may purchase an additional 10 instruments from OptiConcepts.

Christine Pons, OptiConcepts owner and business unit director, said being able to meet the Air Force's specifications, and price, was rewarding, as was beating out some of the largest names in the test and measurement market. They included EXFO, Agilent, JDSU and Corning Cable Systems.

"The competition represented German, Canadian and Japanese engineering, so it was truly a global win for us," Sean Pons said.

OptiConcepts began as a provider of fiber optic simulation systems, and has evolved



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Sean Pons demonstrates fiber optic test equipment at OptiConcepts in Hickory.

SEE TESTING, B8

TESTING: More products in works

advanced electrical test and measurement instruments.

As fiber optic testing evolves, OptiConcepts plans to evolve with it.

"We've got several products in the works," Sean Pons said.

"We're looking forward to significant growth."

FROM PAGE B1

into the test and measurement field.

Designing and building its products here, OptiConcepts sells internationally to telecommunications companies, manufacturers, and contractors for various local area networks including hospitals and universities.

Its optical time domain reflectometers are designed for various applications including qualification, certification and trouble-shooting of optical networks.

In addition to the military, schools, telephone and cable television companies, Internet data centers and electronic manufacturers such as Honeywell use the equipment.

This is OptiConcepts' first government contract, although it has done government subcontract work before.

OptiConcepts officials said that in addition to offering superior value for the price, the company's optical time domain reflectometers appealed to the Air Force because they are user-friendly.

"These instruments can be very difficult to use," Sean Pons said.

"We have spent a lot of time making ours easy to use so you don't have to send your high-

est-grade engineer out in the middle of the night to run a test."

The company aims to expand into various fields, including medical instrumentation and