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WEEKEND EDITION

Middletown firm earns science education grant

By Matt Sheley
Daily News staff

MIDDLETOWN — A local high-tech company has received a collaborative research grant through the Rhode Island Science & Technology Advisory Council.

Rite-Solutions, a system and software engineering firm in the Aquidneck Corporate Park, was awarded a \$199,000 joint marine science education grant with the University of Rhode Island to help develop software to provide access to data at the school's Inner Space Center.

A total of \$1.44 million in grants, intended to help move the state forward in the fields of science and technology and put Rhode Islanders to work, were announced Thursday by Gov. Lincoln D. Chafee. The program also is intended to better position Rhode Island as the economy continues to change and evolve, officials said.

Terry Feeley, who pursues new ventures for Rite-Solutions, said the firm was thrilled to be awarded a joint grant and applauded the state's efforts to grow a variety of high-tech businesses.

"Looking over the projects, I think people will be surprised to see the level of work going on right in their own backyard," Feeley said. "The state program is a seed program and the funding has gone a long way. They're clearly getting a good return on its investment."

Created in 2007, the state has invested approximately \$6.5 million in 38 projects across the state, encompassing 97 researchers and 35 public and private institutions. Nearly \$10

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of Rite-Solutions in Middletown

million in federal and private funding has resulted from the STAC Research Awards, supporting research efforts, new patents, equipment and the formation of new companies.

Primarily known for its defense-related work tied into the activities at Naval Station Newport, Rite-Solutions has been working with URI for approximately 10 years, an effort coordinated for the company by Jay Ferguson, Feeley said.

Under the leadership of internationally known explorer and professor Robert Ballard, URI has situated itself as a major player in the oceanography fields and related disciplines, he said.

"The disciplines used in mapping and understanding the ocean floor for the defense industry and growing knowledge are the same," Feeley said. "Just like Houston is known for NASA, URI will be that center for ocean-related research."

Chafee said such unique work is key to assisting the economic recovery in the Ocean State.

"I believe that in order to create jobs and grow our economy we must focus on our existing assets — and some of Rhode

Island's most valuable assets are the great minds at work at our colleges, universities, and medical institutions," Chafee said in a prepared statement. "These grants — and the potential follow-on funding that they may yield — are an investment in the future of our state. I am pleased to see this level of collaboration between our private sector firms and our hospitals and institutions of higher education, and I look forward to the research and innovation these grants will make possible."

Others agreed.

"These grants not only support some of the state's most promising research endeavors, they also foster the type of collaboration that's crucial to growing our knowledge economy," said Keith W. Stokes, executive director of the state's Economic Development Corp. "The significant increase this year in the number of award applicants and the number of private firms willing to partner with academic and medical institutions demonstrates the vitality and promise of the state's health, science and technology sectors."

"Making capital available for research projects, which have the potential to attract later-stage capital is a good approach for encouraging entrepreneurship and start-up companies," state General Treasurer Gina M. Raimondo said in a prepared statement. "I look forward to learning more about all these projects as their research progresses."

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