

IN THE NEWS

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by **Mark Urban, The Record-Eagle, Traverse City, Mich.**

Small businesses come up big

Mar. 22—LANSING — The pandemic forced many a small Michigan business to shift gears.

Hybrid Robotics took it a little more literal than some small companies.

Pitching its Catalina UHS (Unmanned Hybrid System) before more than 300 experts before the pandemic, the Traverse City startup was asked about commercial applications outside its patent-pending signature product.

When access to customers at trade shows was eliminated in 2020, Hybrid Robotics changed its focus to improving and marketing the Tether Management System, a winch system that was part of the Catalina UHS, but could also be attached to other autonomous surface vehicles.

“(The pandemic) kind of stopped out efforts with that,” Hybrid Robotics co-founder and president Matt Goddard said. “As a young start-up that’s what we had to do.”

Hybrid Robotics is in the middle of its first production run of seven of its Tether Management System.

“All but one are paid for already,” Goddard said.

The switch was smart business for the Traverse City company founded in 2018 by Ryan Mater (operations management), Aaron Bottke (head of research and development) and Goddard.

Hybrid Robotics was named one of 13 companies named as a SmartZone Best Small Business. The awards are part of the Michigan Celebrates Small Business awards announced on Friday.

Goddard said the SmartZone Best Small Business is part of what he predicts will be a strong one for the company.

“We are really excited about this year,” he said. “This year is going to be a real good year.”

Goddard said the TMS is machined by Grand Traverse Tool and that 80% of the product is manufactured in-house. “We’re keeping it as much as we can internal,” he said.

Goddard said Hybrid Robotics is also much more than three founders and new CEO Paul Klug. It also includes investors such as Boomerang Catapult Principal Casey Cowell and the rest of his staff and 20Fathoms among others.

“We have a real good team in our corner,” Goddard said.

Hybrid Robotics is among the state companies invited to the 19th annual Michigan Celebrates Small Business Awards Gala May 2 at the Breslin Student Events Center in East Lansing. Gala tickets can be purchased at www.MichiganCelebrates.org.

The other SmartZone Best Small Businesses by headquarters included Accelerated Filtration, Inc., Midland; Bear-ex, Jackson; Ensired Solutions, East Lansing; Excelsior Engineering, Rochester; Farmish, Grand Rapids; Giggso, Inc., Troy; MQT Innovations, Inc., Marquette; Revolin Sports, Holland; Steelhead Technologies, Calumet; Sticker Blitz, Berkley; Urban Electronics, Inc., Detroit; and Workpack Solutions, Grand Rapids.

While most of the Michigan Celebrates Small Business award winners were announced on Friday, the Michigan Small Business Development Center Best Small Business winners were named on Wednesday, which Gov. Gretchen Whitmer named as SBDC Day.

“Michigan’s small businesses are foundational to our strong communities and growing economy,” Whitmer said in a release from the Michigan SBDC. “We must continue working across the aisle to ensure they have the workforce and resources they need to grow and expand in Michigan.”

“We’re honored the Governor recognizes the significant role the Michigan SBDC plays in the small business ecosystem, and we are humbled to walk alongside our clients in their small business journeys,” Michigan SBDC CEO and Executive Director J.D. Collins said in the release. “Our consultants take great pride in their work as ‘connectors’ in the economic development community, and their strong relationships with our clients make all the difference.”

Stafford’s Hospitality, Inc. in Emmet County was one of 11 Michigan SBDC Small Business award winners. The other winners by county were City Shield Security Services, Wayne County; Barney’s BakeHouse Bakery, Bay County; Eagle Link LLC, Delta County; Freedom Counseling LLC, Kalamazoo County; Groovy Donuts, Ingham County; Ludington Meat Company, Mason County; R.J.’s Metropolitan Ice Cream Co., Jackson County; Sand Bay Marina Sales, Service & Storage, Presque Isle County; Thumb Roast Coffee, Sanilac County; and Wood Shop Social, Isabella County.

The MCSB award list is topped by the 2023 Michigan 50 Companies to Watch list. Northern Michigan was well represented on the list with Bohning Archery in Lake City and Doyle Inc. Roofing in Cheboygan and Petoskey.

The 50 Companies to Watch list also includes Soils & Structures in Muskegon, which has had an office in Traverse City since 2007, according to its website. Also making the list of 50 was Walsh Service Solutions of Kalamazoo. Walsh, which is relocating its headquarters to Sault Ste. Marie, has a northern Michigan office in Petoskey.

The Michigan 50 Distinguished Alumni Awards went to BizStream of Allendale (Great Place to Work) and Zolli Candy of Commerce Township (Strategically Focused).

Walsh Service Solutions joined Allegiant Laundry Services of Hartford as one of two winners of the Minority

Owned Small Business Award. JetCo Solutions of Grand Rapids was named the Veteran Owned Small Business Award.

The final category of awards was the Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) Best Small Businesses and northern Michigan was also well represented.

Arvco Container Corporation of Cadillac and Power Construction Group, LLC of Cheboygan made the PTAC list as did Grand Rapids-based Prein & Newhof, which has an office in Traverse City.

Others on the PTAC Best Small Businesses list were AJP Commercial Shredding, Flint; Arbor Corporation, Inc., Ann Arbor; Austin Logistics, LLC, Detroit; Duro-Last, Inc., Saginaw; KMI, Battle Creek; North American Controls, Shelby Township; and SeaLandAire Technologies, Inc., Jackson.

The complete list of MCSB 2023 awardees can be found at <https://michigancelebrates.org/mcsb-awardees/>.