



Showcase for Commerce draws crowd

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More than \$100 million worth of contracts is expected to be announced this morning at Showcase for Commerce.

But even the combined power of all of those deals won't make it the biggest deal of the month on the local defense scene.

That deal was announced two weeks ago when DRS Technologies Inc. confirmed it had entered into a definitive merger agreement with Italian defense heavyweight Finmeccanica.

Mark Newman, chief executive officer of DRS Technologies, visited Johnstown on Thursday for the business expo. He said the deal was set in motion more than a year ago but no serious talks started until early this year.

The deal will leave DRS maintaining its operations as they are, but allowing Finmeccanica to have a stronger foothold in the lucrative U.S. defense market.

Newman said the company will be a wholly owned subsidiary of Finmeccanica, but that won't have much impact on operations including at the company's DRS Laurel Technologies plant in Richland Township.

"They're a great company with a lot of capabilities, and we think we can add to that," Newman said. "It's a great fit. They want to be more involved in the U.S. market and this will allow us greater opportunities in international markets."

Newman said the DRS Laurel plant will continue to play a vital role in operations.

"We've created a manufacturing center of excellence here," Newman said. "Not only does that allow us to go out and bring in more work from outside customers, but we're able to place more intracompany work here.

"We have a great work force and a great facility here, and I'm very happy with the results."

Another success

Dan DeVos, presiding as chairman over showcase for the final time as CEO of Concurrent

Technologies Corp., said the event is off to a great start.

DeVos said he heard more positive comments from out-of-towners than ever before.

“The enthusiasm is terrific,” DeVos said.

“There was a lot of talk about (U.S. Rep. John Murtha) regarding not only his contributions in defense and defense technology, but the contributions he has made across the board.”

Boomerang business

BBN Technologies of Massachusetts is a first-time exhibitor at this year’s showcase, but it’s familiar with the region.

The success of one of BBN’s latest products, Boomerang, figures to depend heavily on this region.

Boomerang is a system that is mounted to land military vehicles that can determine the direction, elevation and distance of a sniper shot within seconds of firing.

Currently, more than 1,000 units are deployed in Iraq. The company said that represents only about 2 percent of the entire market it could serve.

One problem it faces is money.

Boomerang isn’t an official military program, so it isn’t included in the defense budget.

That’s why the company is looking for Murtha’s support. It is hoping to generate enough funding to mass-produce thousands more units, which sell for about \$15,000 apiece, at DRS Laurel in Richland.

“Johnstown has become very important to us,” said Mark Ivanov of BBN. “We’re relying on Mr. Murtha to fund this through his role in Congress, and we’re relying on DRS here to build these units.

“Really, it all comes down to doing what’s best for the war fighters.”