

Innovative Oklahoma companies on display at fifth annual Technology Showcase

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When U.S. soldiers in hostile territory suspect the road ahead is booby trapped with improvised explosive devices, they can turn to innovative technology developed by an Oklahoma company to ensure their safety.

Curtis Sprague, with Broken Arrow's Tactical Electronics, told an attentive audience Wednesday at the annual Oklahoma Technology Showcase hosted by Northeastern State University and OCAST how soldiers can save lives by using the company's technology to defeat explosive devices.

The Sire remote controlled robot is designed to carry its own explosive payload up to the suspected device and blow it up. The robot is so light and compact that three of them will fit in a soldier's backpack.

"The military had a very specific need for a robot that they could put explosives in, send downrange and detonate," said Sprague. "It's very cheap compared to other robotic systems because it's designed to be destroyed."

Tactical Electronics provides training, tools and equipment to military and law enforcement customers. It exhibited a variety of cameras at the Tech Showcase that were attached to flexible extension pipes, long poles and even connected to thin devices that can be slid under a door.

"Anything we make comes from a customer request," said Sprague, who was a member of a police Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) unit before joining Tactical Electronics five years ago. "We don't make anything on spec."

Tactical Electronics, which employs about 80 people from its Broken Arrow headquarters, was one of six innovative Oklahoma companies that made presentations at Wednesday's Tech Showcase.

The Tech Showcase audience also heard presentations from Pryor's HE&M Saw; Optecks and Synercon, both of Tulsa; Spiers New Technologies from Oklahoma City; and Amethyst Research Inc. of Ardmore. The event was sponsored by the Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science and Technology (OCAST).

"These innovative companies and the research that drives them demonstrate how diverse Oklahoma's economy is, even in a prolonged energy industry downturn," said C. Michael Carolina, OCAST executive director. "We are proud of the innovations showcased here today, because they are examples of the enterprising nature of Oklahoma entrepreneurs."

In addition to the company presentations, a special unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) competition by area colleges and high schools was conducted in the atrium of the administration building on the NSU campus.

Three OCAST Impact Awards were presented during a noon luncheon, honoring Dr. Brenda Rolls with Frontier Electronics in Stillwater, Phil Albert of Pelco Structural of Claremore and Representative Scott Martin from Norman. Keynote speakers at the luncheon were Scott Goodwin with Flight Safety International and Steve Hahn with AT&T.

Rajitha Dissanayake, an engineer with Pryor's HE&M Saw, described how technology has become a key element of the manufacturing industry. HE&M makes 70 different models of steel cutting band saws that are used by the petroleum, agriculture, automotive and steel industries.

Almost every HE&M Saw product includes what Dissanayake called a programmable logic controller (PLC) that ensures precise cutting specifications.

"We've been putting a PLC and touchscreen on almost every saw because the generation has shifted to touchscreens," Dissanayake said. "The operation of the bandsaw is done primarily through the touchscreen."