

Mentis Sciences, Inc. is Manchester's 1st SBA HUBZone Certified Business

Internship Program brings Math and Science to life for Manchester teens

Mentis Sciences, Inc. is a small engineering firm located in the heart of Manchester's historic mill district. The company was founded in 1996 by John F. Dignam following more than thirty years of service at the Army Materials Research Lab, where he served as the Army's Director of Missile Materials. Their corporate mission focuses on providing valuable engineering expertise and products that improve the quality of life for US Servicemen and citizens at home and abroad.

Mentis provides its customers with technical and engineering assistance in the design, development and testing of advanced composite materials. The company has excelled in the areas of research and development of new lightweight composite materials that provide the strength, durability, and affordability needed for today's advanced manufacturing requirements

During the summer of 2012 John J. Dignam, President and CEO of Mentis Sciences, became aware that the historic mill area of Manchester and several other sections of the city are federally qualified as Historically Underutilized Business Zones (HUBZones), and that the company had the potential to be certified by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) as a HUBZone firm.

The SBA HUBZone program promotes increased economic opportunity to formerly vibrant areas through increased investment in employees residing in the zone and in their plants and equipment. The program provides federal contracting advantages to companies that are owned by U.S. Citizens, maintain their principal office in a HUBZone designated area and have a workforce that includes at least 35% residents of a HUBZone.

In the summer of 2012 Mentis employed approximately 25 men and women, most of whom had an educational background in science and engineering. The company also had a robust internship program that employed largely engineering students from New England Colleges and Universities during the summer months.

When John J. Dignam looked at the potential for certification as a SBA HUBZone firm, he took a path that is unique in the nation. John decided to expand his workforce by expanding the Mentis Internship Program with emphasis on local high school students in good academic standing who were also residing in the HUBZone in Manchester, NH. John sought out youth candidates through non-traditional avenues such as Manchester's Police Athletic League, the Salvation Army, and Manchester's Office of Youth Services. He wanted to find young people with a good attitude and a high motivation to work and learn. He realized that for students to realize meaningful education and training from the program it would require a commitment of his business resources and of all the men and women who worked at Mentis.

In the weeks and months that followed, John brought on board a total of 17 high school students, with 14 working there today. Interns have shadowed existing Mentis personnel in machining, computer repair, general office duties, composite fabrication, machine and machine tool preventative maintenance, and general shop duties. John and his staff recognized that

supplemental, focused education in math and physical sciences would be extremely valuable to program participants, and they created an innovative educational plan that included having Mentis engineers provide dedicated presentations on specific subjects for three hours of class, weekly.

As John speaks about the program, you can feel the pride he has with an initiative that is producing substantive, tangible results that are exceeding all of his initial expectations. Not only has the Mentis Internship Program had a very positive impact on the students involved, but John is quick to point out that it has also had a positive impact on the engineers and scientists at Mentis. It is clear that through their efforts these young men and women are discovering that they are truly the authors of their futures.

In commenting on the positive aspects of the high school internship program, John Dignam said “Engineers and scientists explain to the young interns why they are using certain processes and materials to address age old technical challenges, and they provide hands-on instruction and demonstrations. Through these exchanges, Mentis engineers gain valuable experience in quantifying and optimizing their activities, and mentoring next generation workers on best practices. This helps to make them better engineers and leaders. Likewise, students are seeing science “come alive” and, suddenly, what had previously seemed like dry class material at their schools gains increased importance and relevance. This makes them better students, and stimulates the kind of intellectual curiosity that is critical to success in future academic and professional activities.”

Following a recent tour of the Mentis Sciences facility, Greta Johansson, District Director of the SBA office in New Hampshire added “The commitment of John and the staff at Mentis has made a real and lasting difference in the lives of these young people. Their time spent working and learning has expanded the scope of their vision as they look beyond social and economic challenges towards careers in science and manufacturing.”

In May of 2013 Mentis Sciences attained their SBA certification as a HUBZone firm and became the first HUBZone certified firm in Manchester, NH. As the 2013-2014 school year begins five of the high school internship participants are beginning their college classes with three attending local colleges where they will continue their studies in math and the sciences while working at Mentis.