Small Kansas tech companies receive federal grant money

By Dan Voorhis
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A top federal official visited Wichita on Tuesday to learn more about the companies aided by a federal economic development grant.

The roughly $850,000 U.S. Economic Development Administration grant has gone to several small Kansas companies and individuals with groundbreaking technologies. U.S. Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Economic Development John Fernandez spoke to a group of university, government and company officials at Wichita State University.

The grant is the federal government’s attempt to streamline efforts by combining money from different federal agencies and then, following a competition, getting it into the hands of local people who know which companies have potential.

“When you get outside of Washington, you realize how hard it is to deal with Washington,” said Fernandez, a former mayor of Bloomington, Ind.

At Tuesday’s event, Zulma Toro-Ramos, dean of WSU’s engineering school, announced the award of $50,000 to Nitride Solutions, a Wichita company that is developing a less expensive method for making solid-state electronics, light-emitting diodes and ultraviolet laser diodes.

Mike McCoy, an assistant professor of engineering at WSU, won a $20,000 grant to help develop a lighter weight emergency battery with Cessna Aircraft.

The two winners emerged from tough competition.

“It was such a pleasure to see the number of people, the ideas, the engagement,” Toro-Ramos said.

“If those innovators are out there, there is hope for our country,” she said. “They only need a mechanism like the one we are providing them, and we will be leaders in advanced manufacturing.”

WSU has already made awards from the grant to JR Custom Metal Products, TSI Technologies and Kansas State University student Isaac Spear.

Fernandez said Wichita won the grant because it has a clearly defined cluster of companies in advanced materials. Clusters have demonstrated the ability to spark innovation because of the expertise and resources in that cluster.

“It’s all about accelerating a well-defined cluster’s expertise,” he said.

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