



Oakland companies make the grade

Of The Oakland Press

Four Oakland County companies have made it onto the Inc. 500, a closely watched list of fast-growing, entrepreneurial companies, assembled annually by Inc. Magazine.

Solid Signal.com of West Bloomfield, Secure-24 of Southfield, American Laser Centers of Farmington Hills and Big Communications of Ferndale all earned spots on the 2007 Inc. 500, which was released earlier this week.

The 26th annual Inc. 500 list measures revenue growth from 2003 through 2006. To qualify, companies had to be U.S.-based and privately held, independent and have had at least \$200,000 in revenue in 2003 and \$2 million in 2006.

The magazine expanded the list this year to cover 5,000 companies, and - in all - 148 Michigan companies found spots on the list. Of the 148 Michigan companies on the expanded list, 48 of them - 32 percent of the state's total - were based in Oakland County.

"If you want to find out which companies are going to change the world, look at the Inc. 500," said Inc. Editor Jane Berentson.

In Oakland County, Solid Signal sells satellite dishes, outdoor antennae and consumer electronics products via the Internet. The company's explosive growth of 1,137 percent during the survey period put it at 183 in the magazine's annual ranking.

Jerry Chapman, Solid Signal's president, said his company offers customers the high-quality, digital audio and video equipment needed to access various media outlets. Solid Signal also was among the top 500 Internet retailers in the United States in 2005.

"What makes us different is we sort of hold your hand and walk you through the technical parts. About 40 percent is repeat business. We get you something that works. We take it to a real personal level," Chapman said.

Secure-24 provides information security and managed-hosting services and it has clients in financial services, health care, government agencies and the automobile industry, according to the company's Web site. It grew by 838 percent and ranked 320th on the Inc. 500 list.

Big Communications is another fast-growing Michigan-based company, which recently opened offices in Philadelphia and Chicago. It specializes in sales training for personnel in the pharmaceutical industry. The company was No. 457 on the Inc. list as it grew by 638 percent.

American Laser Centers of Farmington Hills ranked 403 on the Inc. 500 list by growing 720 percent. It outstripped the other local companies on the list by reporting \$92.8 million in revenue at the end of 2006. It also had more than 1,100 employees.

American Laser Centers founder and Chief Executive Officer Rich Morgan said the company continues to expand, posting 53 percent year-over-year sales growth so far this year. The company also is closing in on its 2007 sales goal of \$160 million, he said.

The company now operates in 32 states and Puerto Rico.

To support the rapid growth, American Laser Centers has added 403 new employees this year, including 125 at its Farmington Hills headquarters, said Morgan. After its latest expansion, the company now has 1,368 employees.

"Our growth reflects increased demand for nonsurgical cosmetic procedures," Morgan said. "In addition, our commitment to providing high-quality, convenient and consistently effective services to consumers has generated brand loyalty.

This positive reputation continues to help us attract more new clients."

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