

## **SRI Spins Off A ‘Game-Changer’ For Bedbugs**

New Pest Detection Product Licensed To County Company

**By JEREMY HUNT**

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**HARRISONBURG** — SRI Shenandoah Valley’s first spinoff could be a “game-changer” for its ability to detect a pesky, revulsion-inducing pest.

The research firm recently licensed its bedbug detection technology, which was developed at its Rockingham County facility over the past three years, to local company Redcoat Solutions Inc.

SRI Shenandoah Valley is a division of SRI International, a Silicon Valley- based research and development nonprofit.

SRI came to the Valley about six years ago and worked out of James Madison University until its Center for Advanced Drug Research, or CADRE, opened at Rockingham County’s research and technology park.

SRI is the first and so far only tenant of Innovation Village @ Rockingham, located just north of Harrisonburg on North Valley Pike.

But County Administrator Joe Paxton says Redcoat could get the ball rolling at the park.

“It’s a huge step to start getting spinoffs up at Innovation Village,” he said.

Redcoat Solutions is owned by John Hall, who also owns Camp Horizons. Redcoat will operate out of the camp’s existing management facility, which is also on North Valley Pike.

Hall will bring SRI’s research onto the market under the product brand Rapid Pursuit.

Jared Burden, spokesman for Redcoat, said company officials hope to launch the product this summer.

At first, Burden said, it will follow a business- to- business model, being marketed to pest control companies and hotel management firms.

A few months later, it will be marketed to consumers, with a focus on international travelers, he said.

“ This is an unprecedented product,” Burden said. “We view it as a game-changer, and [it] will be unlike any other product.”

Krishna Kodukula, executive director of SRI Shenandoah Valley, said researchers saw an opportunity during an infestation outbreak a few years ago that dominated media headlines for a time.

“Determining presence or absence is what you need to do,” he said, adding that early detection is the key to staving off bedbugs.

Kodukula said the small device works by using a swab that’s dipped in a solution, rubbed on the testing site and then dipped into another solution.

A press release from SRI says the technology identifies molecules specific to bedbugs. The release hails Rapid Pursuit as more effective, easier to use, more affordable and more discreet than anything else now available. “ Unlike other detection devices, the test requires no sophisticated equipment and registers a response in minutes, and Rapid Pursuit is designed to detect only bedbugs, avoiding confusion that could be caused by the presence of other pests,” the release says.

Other detection methods include trying to attract and trap bedbugs, inspecting visually, and using dogs to sniff them out.

Burden declined to provide a rate of accuracy for Rapid Pursuit but said it’s “ very accurate.”

“It is at the top level of accuracy over any other way to detect that currently is on the market,” he said.

Conversations and research indicate Rapid Pursuit will be well received, Burden added.

“It’s an exciting thing for the area because this is the first spinoff of SRI, and we’re excited to be a part of it,” he said.

Robin Sullenberger, executive director of economic development group Shenandoah Valley Partnership, said he expects the region will get a lot of exposure from the product’s introduction.

“What they’re doing there ... is a huge step for any industry that has to deal with that issue, which is unpleasant to the public,” said Sullenberger, who helped bring SRI to the Valley along with Rockingham County government officials. “ So if you’re doing anything to address it, the potential impact, both socially and financial, is huge.”

When SRI, JMU and state and local officials announced CADRE in December 2006, it was expected to generate a spinoff business every five years.

Kodukula said SRI is right on schedule, but Sullenberger said the first spinoff is “slightly behind the curve in terms of the timing of what we originally anticipated.”

The economic downturn and evolution of the biotechnology industry played a role, he said.

But, Sullenberger said, an exact timeline was never established, and there was no doubt spinoffs would come to fruition.

More are coming, too, he said.

“There are several potential spinoffs actually being anticipated right now, and the timing of those is going to be much shorter,” he said, declining to elaborate on the nature of the companies.

An encouraging development with Redcoat, Sullenberger said, is that SRI provided an opportunity for a local entrepreneur to invest in its research.

“That bodes well for the future,” he said, “as far as spurring some enthusiasm for internal growth in our area.”

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