

Gov. Brownback Visits Shawnee Company Named State's Top Exporter

International exports help Shawnee company thrive

By Stephen Montemayor September 22, 2011

Bio-Microbics President and CEO Bob Rebori shows Gov. Sam Brownback one of his company's water treatment devices. Brownback visited the Shawnee company Thursday for a tour and to commemorate its 2011 Kansas Exporter of the Year distinction.

The president and CEO of [Bio-Microbics](#), a Shawnee water treatment company recently named [Kansas Exporter of the Year](#), has had a wild few months leading up to Gov. Sam Brownback's visit Thursday.

Before Bob Rebori could lead Brownback on a tour of his warehouse and thank the governor for the distinction — for which Bio-Microbics, 8450 Cole Parkway, had been a finalist for the past three years — Rebori's rigorous travel schedule to the 60 countries Bio-Microbics exports to was in full swing.

One week he slept in a traditional Mongolian dwelling on the steps Genghis Khan once called headquarters. Two weeks later he led a presentation in front of a packed house of Israeli defense forces.

"I was the only non-Jew inside that place, and I can assure you they were nervous," Rebori said.

The multitude of destinations represent the diversity of currencies that account for 70 percent of Bio-Microbics' revenues.

Rebori founded the company in 1996 to commercialize technology to treat wastewater and storm water run-off for decentralized homes and communities.

From servicing subdivisions in New Zealand, homes in Mexico and Poland, marine vessels, Latvian electrical plants, Iowa hotels, Bio-Microbics has long had the attention of competitors both large and small.

This year, Brownback took notice, telling Rebori that his export-driven model represented what businesses in Kansas and in the United States need to do more of while seeking to avoid long-term economic decline.

"You've got an innovative product that you manufacture and sell and market around the world that makes other places better at a price they can afford," Brownback said. "That is what we've got to do."

In fact, it was that model that kept Bio-



Microbics above water so to speak, when the Great Recession struck three years ago. Rebori said the company began concentrating its efforts on export markets as a buffer against seasonal market fluctuations. By 2008, he said, those sales allowed Bio-Microbics to stay afloat. Though Rebori declined to provide revenue numbers, his company's export sales have increased 51 percent from 2007 to 2010, according to a July news release.

Rebori has lived in and around Shawnee since 1982, the longest period of time he said he's lived anywhere. Rebori was born in New York City, grew up in New Jersey and attended Rider University before eventually coming to Shawnee. Bio-Microbics began as a company of one before expanding to 21 employees in Shawnee and 13 at a St. Louis location. Rebori said he chose Shawnee to live and work because of its proximity to the highway, which often has him en route to the airport.

Rebori said more than half of Bio-Microbics' employees travel, and many of them do so internationally. But it's also Bio-Microbics that welcomes international visitors as Croatia, Mongolia, United Arab Emirates, Philippines and Nigeria are among the places Rebori said most people really didn't know existed but travel to Shawnee to do business.

Rebori's address to a room full of employees, executives and visitors from the City of Shawnee was peppered with jokes and axioms. One joke claimed to be the real story of how Bio-Microbics landed the Exporter of the Year award: While escorting the pope from the airport, Rebori allowed the pope to take the wheel; the state trooper that pulled the group over, allowed them to proceed under the impression that whomever the pope was chauffeuring must have been of high import.

Each table in the audience had a set of axioms to recite in a call and response segment, as Rebori used adages like "I never got a job from a poor person" to thank his parents — visiting from New York City — for providing early financial support as Bio-Microbics was getting off the ground.

This year's distinction follows a 2009 Exporter of the Year award from the U.S. Department of Commerce's official publication and a host of other awards and certificates.

"This never gets old," Rebori said after the ceremony.



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