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4 Wichitans get Pipeline fellowships

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OVERLAND PARK — Four Wichitans were among the 10 Kansans selected for the Pipeline technology entrepreneurship fellowship — the most since its inception.

The announcement of the 2010 Pipeline Innovators was made Thursday night at Pipeline's Innovator of the Year event at the Overland Park Sheraton, which drew about 400 people, organizers said.

Jason Tatge of Lenexa-based Farms Technology was named the 2009 Innovator of the Year.

The Wichitans named to the 2010 Pipeline class are: Tahir Ahmad, CEO and founder of PetroPower; Nate Gregory, CEO of MoJack Distributors; Jeremy Jones, president and CEO of Nitride Solutions; and Ben Tyson, president and CEO of Time Trails.

Ahmad's company provides remote management of oil and gas wells using cell phones and laptop computers. "The guidance and mentorship (Pipeline will provide) is very important in my business," Ahmad said. "That's why I'm here."

Gregory's MoJack Distributors is a product development company that specializes in the lawn and garden industry. Gregory said he's looking forward to the contacts he'll develop over the coming year, including with venture capitalists, fellow innovators and serial entrepreneurs.

Jones formed Nitride Solutions after serving as a vice president at Koch Genesis, the venture capital unit of Koch Industries. His company, which relocated from Manhattan to Wichita, is commercializing a manufacturing process for aluminum nitride, a material used in next-generation light-emitting diodes (LEDs). Jones said he's expecting the fellowship to provide him with some "tremendously supportive" counsel as he moves his company forward. "There are a lot of challenges you face as an entrepreneur," Jones said.

And Tyson's company is a Web technology company that has created a visualization method of historical events based on time and geographical location around a virtual globe.

As innovators, the four men will attend four three-day-long education sessions held in various cities through the state over the course of a year, and access to mentors and venture capitalists.

Since Pipeline's founding, only two other Wichitans have been selected as innovators: Joey Blue in the 2007 class and Gary Mason, CEO of iSi Environmental Services, in the 2009 class.

Mason said Thursday that the fellowship has been of "tremendous value" to him in figuring out not only how to proceed with a new venture but also how to run the company he and his wife, Karma, have owned for the past 20 years.

"The thing that I see I do differently now, when an opportunity presents itself in our company, I view things differently now, realizing there's a science to the way you view a market opportunity," Gary Mason said.

Pipeline was created in 2006 by the Kansas Technology Enterprise Corp. and its inaugural class of innovators was begun in 2007.

Other 2010 innovators are: Bryan DiGiorgio, founder of Workspace Communications in Overland Park; Jay Kim, president of Lenexa-based Data Locker; Stuart Jackson, president and CEO of AnalyzeDirect in Overland Park; Bob Collister, CEO of Memory Showcase in Lenexa; David Barnes, CEO of Sweet Spot Marketing in Merriam; and Jeff Southard, founder and vice president for drug development at VasoGenix Pharmaceuticals in Lenexa.

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