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MicroTest doubles lab size

By Mike Verespej
PLASTICS NEWS STAFF

NEW YORK — With an investment almost equal to the size of his firm and what he calls “a leap of faith,” Steve Richter has doubled the size of his medical testing lab. The move gives his medical-device-making customers the ability to move their drug-interactive products to market faster.

Richter’s \$7.5 million investment in new and expanded laboratory testing, clean room and analytical services for MicroTest Laboratories Inc. includes a \$1 million virology lab for the expected onslaught of testing that will be required under pharmaceutical good-manufacturing guidelines established by the Food and Drug Administration.

“It pretty much doubles the size of the company from 50 people to 100 people,” and to more than \$10 million in sales, said Richter, MicroTest’s president and chief executive officer, in a June 6 interview at Medical De-

sign and Manufacturing East in New York. Richter founded the business in his home in 1984.

MicroTest customers include medical industry giants Johnson & Johnson, Boston Scientific Corp. and Medtronic Inc. Sales growth averaged 15-20 percent from 1996-2000, and now is on a 40 percent growth trend.

The firm also formed a partnership earlier this year to set up an in-house testing lab for Symmetry PolyVac of Manchester, N.H., a contract manufacturer of plastic surgical instrument delivery trays and cases.

The in-house lab is expected to reduce the time needed to test plastic products for sterilization standards and deliver them in two to four weeks, compared with the typical 10-12 weeks.

MicroTest also will conduct testing for a — one in which the drug is combined with a new de-

livery system — for a large, undisclosed pharmaceutical firm that will be launched later this year. Richter did not reveal the product but said that it has “huge market potential” and that by not having to build its own infrastructure, MicroTest’s customer will be able to bring the product to the market three years earlier.

Richter said MicroTest’s expansion — which includes a small-batch contract manufacturing plant — allows his firm to provide dedicated product management from testing to manufacturing.

Looking ahead, Richter has set aside 5,000 square feet for expansion. “We expect to be expanding in the hospital side,” as companies expand testing to comply with increasingly strict FDA regulations, he said. MicroTest will be adding services, such as clean room and pharmaceutical products testing.