Local inventor reaches milestone

CONNECTICUT POST
TUESDAY
OCTOBER 9, 2007

Pitney Bowes worker gets 101st patent to join very elite group

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SHELTON — Robert Cordery, a Pitney Bowes Inc. research fellow, got his 100th and 101st patents recently making him only the second technologist to hit the century patent mark in the company's 87-year history.

Cordery, a Danbury resident, has worked at Pitney Bowes for 23 years and earned many of his patents at the Shelton Advance Concepts and Technology center. His 100th patent was for a bar-coding system and his 101st was for a system that helps speed the processing of mail that uses encrypted marks to prevent fraud.

"Bob has reached a milestone in his 23-year R&D career that puts him in a category among other great inventors of his time," said Pitney Bowes President and Chief Executive Officer Murray Martin.

The only other Pitney Bowes inventor with more than 100 patents is Ronald Sansone, who holds 121.

"We get 90 or so a year," Cordery said of Pitney Bowes as a company. The company has about 3,500 patents to its credit.

"It's typical for Pitney Bowes and companies like it to have a lot of patents," said Tarek Sobh, Dean of the University of Bridgeport School of Engineering. But added Cordery's "number is not typical" for an individual.

Sobh said businesses are keen to protect intellectual property. For engineers and Ph.D.s in the private sector earning patents is akin to professors publishing research in the academic world, he said. Their jobs can often hang on their discoveries.

Although he was born in England, it's his years studying in Canada, including the University of Toronto, that have left their mark on his speech, especially when he uses the word "about" which sounds almost like "aboot."

Cordery said he was a newly papered Ph.D. in theoretical physics when he got the job with Pitney Bowes. He received his first patent while trying to improve the speed of an ink-jet printer, he said. His idea was to wrap a heater around the nozzle through which the ink flows. It's never been built, he said, but the idea worked in a computer model.

Cordery has had the opportunity to work on a variety of technologies related to retailing and postal products. He did some work on "magnetic electronic monitoring."

Basically, he developed an alarm system that is triggered when a person tries to shoplift an item out of a store.

But lately, he's been focused on stopping fraud.

Because of advances in digital technology, creating stamps and marks that are not easily counterfeited has become a priority for the U.S. Postal Service and Pitney Bowes, he said.

Cordery said people have this misconception that you have to be scientist coming up with some world-changing device to get a patent.

But in reality most "patents are looking at some problem and saying, 'I can do that better,'" he said. Simply put, it's finding a problem people need solved and developing a solution that's faster or better than what's available.

While much of his work has centered on improving the U.S. Postal System, he said, "I'm still amazed you put 41 cents on an envelope and send it to California and it gets there in three days."