

## INNOVATION ON THE RISE

# State Patent Bar Riding Near Record Year

Smaller companies increasingly see value in IP protection

By **CHRISTINA H. DAVIS**  
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**A**fter four straight years of decline, innovation—by way of patent awards—is once again on the rise in Connecticut.

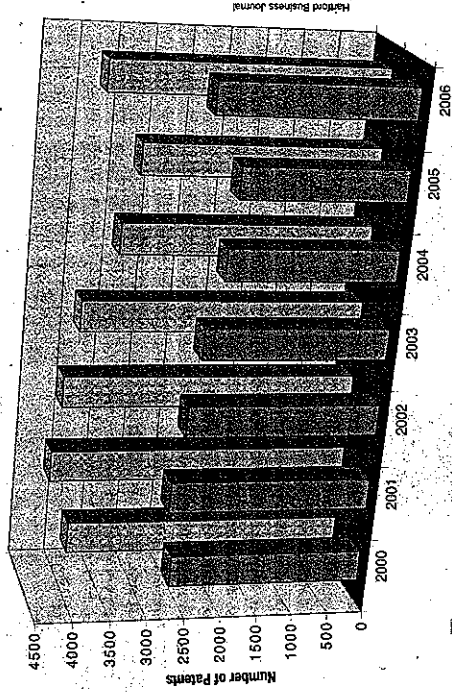
The number of Connecticut inventors who were awarded patents in 2006 totaled 2,640, a 19 percent increase over the number awarded in 2005. Including patent awards for both Connecticut inventors and Connecticut companies, the total for last year ratchets up to 3,773.

While inventiveness seems to be on the rise once again, 2006 totals are still below the peak reached in 2001, when 2,747 patents were awarded to Connecticut inventors.

Marina Cunningham, a partner at the Hartford law firm of McCormick, Paulding & Huber, which specializes in intellectual property, said that Connecticut's increase in patents echoes a national trend.

"In general, the number of patents in the U.S. have increased, with last year one of our record years," she said.

According to the research firm IPI Patent Intelligence, corporate patents issued in the U.S. in 2006 totaled 173,772, an all-time high and a 20.8 percent increase over 2005.



■ Number of patents awarded to Connecticut inventors or companies  
■ Number of patents awarded to Connecticut inventors

A broad spectrum of companies in Connecticut were awarded patents last year, including multi-national giants like Hartford-based United Technologies Corp., Fairfield-based General Electric, and Stamford-based Xerox Corp. and Pitney Bowes.

But small businesses are increasingly getting into the act, according to Cunningham.

"We're seeing more smaller companies, companies that didn't think much about patents in the past," she said.

One such company is Bloomfield-based Alvin & Co., which in 2006 was awarded its first patent ever for a drafting table, known as the CraftMaster, designed and marketed for use in people's homes.

And it's a good thing the company secured the patent, because the product—Alvin & Co.'s number one selling item last year—already has imitators, according to Robert Stearns, purchasing manager for the company and the designer of the table. Stearns said that when he was at a tradeshow in Germany last week that he saw a copy of his table design. "I walked over and asked if they knew there was a patent on the design and told them they might want to do a little research," he said.

One of the reasons for increased patent activity, Cunningham speculated, has been an increase in court cases involving patent litigation. She pointed to the patent battle over the technology used in BlackBerry devices as one that caught a lot of attention and headlines. "That case had a lot of people sitting on pins and needles, including me, because I own a BlackBerry," she said. In that case a small patent firm threatened to shut down BlackBerry-maker Research In Motion over an intellectual property claim, which would have made a lot of addicted users upset. But in the end, Research in Motion settled the patent claim

for \$612.5 million in March 2006, allowing "CrackBerry" addicts to continue with their obsessions.

"People are becoming more patent-conscious," she said.

## Pharma Farming

Another reason patents have risen to the surface of public consciousness is the recent troubles of drug makers, like Pfizer, which is about to see its patent for exclusive manufacture of the blockbuster drug Lipitor expire. As a result, Pfizer—which has its research and development world headquarters in New London—has planned major belt-tightening and layoffs.

Paul Pescatello, president and CEO of CURE (Connecticut United for Research Excellence), said that he expects pharmaceutical companies like Pfizer to stop relying solely on a handful of "blockbuster" drugs and instead produce a greater number of niche pharmaceuticals in order to keep sales numbers stable.

Pescatello also posited that one of the reasons that Connecticut saw a decline in patent activity from 2001 to 2005 may have been the downsizing in corporate headquarters in the state, and that the recent uptick was a good sign for innovation. "The increase that you see recently is really notable in that it's more likely intellectual property being created here for business operating here, not just corporate headquarters," he said. Universities in the state are also responsible for contributing to the number of patents awarded in Connecticut.

One school that has put a greater emphasis on patenting and seeking licenses from the private sector for its patents is the University of Connecticut, which in 2006 was awarded 26 patents. While UConn had an office in charge of technology transfer since 1987, it wasn't until the late 1990s that the university really emphasized the effort, according to Michael Newborg, executive director of the school's Center for Science and Technology Transfer.

Newborg, and the center's seven-member staff, is responsible for poring through research by the university's professors to see what ideas are worth patenting, and which ones might have potential for marketing in the private sector. Newborg said that his office licenses about one dozen UConn patents to private businesses each year, bringing in about \$850,000 annually in licensing fees. ■



Marina Cunningham, a partner at the Hartford law firm of McCormick, Paulding & Huber, said she expects to see more insurance companies patenting their business methods.

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