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**Vaccine Research Contractor from Ohio Is National Small Business Person of the Year; Runners-Up are from Minnesota and Maine**

**WASHINGTON –** When Victoria Tifft was a Peace Corps volunteer working on infectious disease control in Togo more than 20 years ago, she came down with malaria.  But it was the suffering of the local people living under devastating third world conditions that led her to dedicate her life to fighting infectious diseases – and that’s what she’s done.

Today, Tifft – president and CEO of Clinical Research Management Inc., of Hinckley, Ohio – was named 2012 National Small Business Person of the Year by Karen Mills, Administrator of the U.S. Small Business Administration during SBA’s celebration of National Small Business Week in Washington, D.C.

First runner-up is Darrin Swanson, president, CEO and co-founder of Kit Masters, Inc., and Swan Machine LLC, in Perham in western Minnesota.  Second runner-up is Michael Cote, president and founder of Look’s Gourmet Food Company of Whiting, Maine.

“The innovation, inspiration and determination shown by Victoria Tifft have elevated her company, Clinical Research Management, above and beyond the norm,” said Mills.  “These qualities are what make small businesses such a powerful force for job creation in the American economy and in their local communities.  Victoria was determined to fight disease around the world and she persisted, more than 300 jobs along the way. We also are proud that when she needed business advice, she turned to the Small Business Administration’s Ohio Small Business Development Center, and our people were able to help her.

“I applaud Victoria and her team, and I applaud the runners-up and their staffs, and all of the state small business persons of the year who are here today,” Mills said.  “We are grateful for their contributions to our economy.  They are magnificent examples of the character of America’s most successful entrepreneurs.”

The National Small Business Person of the Year and runners-up were selected from among the state winners in 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Guam.  The awards were announced at today’s National Awards Luncheon, sponsored by Sage North America.

Tifft built her dream-fulfilling company from scratch after she took a job at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research after her return from West Africa.  While there, she identified an

opportunity to help the Army with pre-clinical early and late-stage clinical vaccine trials.

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Seizing her chance, Victoria created Clinical Research Management, also known as ClinicalRM.  The company supports development of FDA-regulated vaccines, pharmaceuticals, and medical devices for government and commercial customers. ClinicalRM helped create – and today manages – the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research’s Clinical Trials Center. The Center develops vaccines for infectious diseases such as malaria and E. coli.

ClinicalRM has achieved amazing growth. Employing three people in 1994, the company maintains domestic and international operations today with a staff of 331. Annual revenues have increased from $17 million in 2007 to $40 million in 2010.  SBA’s resource partners, which include the Kent Procurement Technical Assistance Center, and the Ohio Small Business Development Center have supported ClinicalRM’s growth.

First runner-up Swanson built his business on twin pillars: “Never sacrifice quality for speed or cost” and “give back to your community.”  Both have paid off handsomely.  Darrin is currently CEO and chairman of Kit Masters, Inc. and Swan Machine, Inc., two related companies he founded together with his father Keith. The companies specialize in manufacturing and servicing clutches for heavy-duty vehicles, mostly for the American aftermarket.

As they grew their businesses, Swanson and his father sought help from Minnesota’s West Central Small Business Development Center. Through his continued partnership with the WCSBDC, Swanson has been able to secure loans and expand his facility, creating new jobs, export markets, and increased profits. Today, his businesses have more than $20 million in annual sales, a workforce of 50 employees and more than 10 export contracts.

Second runner-up Cote bought a Pepperidge Farm bakery distributorship after graduating from high school, and doubled its sales in his first year. After several years that saw him progress through the ranks and become senior vice president of National Sales and Operations, Cote used savings a and financing from local banks and the SBA to buy the assets of a canning company on the brink of foreclosure in 2003.

Cote  renamed the company Look’s Gourmet Food Company and quickly turned it around.  In eight years, Mike has been able to get his company’s products on the shelves of more than 30 percent of U.S. grocery stores, and has landed big name accounts like Whole Foods Markets.  Company sales in January of 2010 alone exceeded total sales from the first year. All the while, Mike has continued to create economic opportunity for his fellow Mainers and Look’s now employs 28 people in a very challenging business.

*Small Business Week 2012 sponsors and cosponsors include: AARP, Association of Small Business Development Companies, AT&T, Dun & Bradstreet, InterContinental Hotels Group, International Franchise Association, Lockheed Martin, Microsoft, National Association of Development Companies, National Association of Government Guaranteed Lenders,  National Association for the Self-Employed, National Small Business Association, Neustar, Northrop Grumman, Office Depot, Paychex, Inc., Prudential, Raytheon, Sage North America, Salesgenie, SCORE, Small Business Investor Alliance,T- Mobile, VISA, Wall Street Journal and Women Impacting Public Policy.*

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