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ROBERT N. SCHMIDT

NSBA SMALL BUSINESS ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR

MIDWEST REGION FINALIST, CLEVELAND, OHIO

IN 1990, ROBERT N. SCHMIDT STARTED TWO FIRMS, Orbital Research and Cleveland Medical Devices, each of which was named to *Inc.* magazine's list of fastest-growing companies. That seems apt, since Schmidt now spends a good chunk of his time promoting the creativity, expertise and capabilities of small businesses to government officials.

He has been working with the National Institutes of Health to help small businesses get medical products to market faster. He has also been lobbying the military to give small businesses a fair chance at winning contracts.

"The military usually awards billion-dollar contracts on which small companies don't have the resources to bid," he says. "We need to change the rules so the troops in the field have access to the latest, greatest technology being developed by small businesses."

As a licensed engineer who holds 21 U.S. patents, Schmidt remains deeply concerned about America maintaining its technology edge. His companies have shelves full of awards for innovative products, such as a wireless brain monitor that can help identify non-convulsive brain seizures that often go undiagnosed. He also co-founded NEOBio, an organization that assists bioscience companies in northeast Ohio with networking, education, and public relations.

"Our economy can grow fastest by encouraging reinvestment by small business in the latest technology."

Schmidt devotes about 15 percent of his time to small-business advocacy. In 2002, he helped promote new legislation that gave small businesses a tax break for new equipment. "We did a survey of *Inc.* 500 presidents and found that 87 percent favored an increased deduction for purchasing new equipment over a reduction on the tax rate of corporate dividends," he says.

How did he celebrate the bill's passage? "I smiled, but by the time it passed I was already working on the next thing," he said. "That's the way it is in entrepreneur time. By the time the successes come, you're already three generations ahead working on something else."

If you—or someone you know—is a passionate advocate for small business, we'd like to hear from you. We're the National Small Business Association, and we're looking to honor small business champions like Robert Schmidt. Five finalists will be profiled in the pages of MONEY®, and the winner will be celebrated at the opening luncheon of our annual Washington Presentation in May 2006.

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