**IGNITING CHANGE**

Ted McLaughlin ’90 CLAS founded DiSorb Systems, a leading manufacturer of medical waste treatment products, in 2000. The company’s operations are based in an economically challenged area of North Philadelphia, where he is committed to hiring local residents who are military veterans or have criminal records.

**Economic Boon**

**Entrepreneur’s company revitalizes community and empowers veterans**

*By Susan Cousins Breen*

Four years in the US Navy taught Edward “Ted” McLaughlin Jr. ’90 CLAS the importance of discipline and service. His undergraduate education at Villanova instilled the value of community and the spirit of an entrepreneur.

McLaughlin has combined those experiences to launch an impressive career, founding and leading DiSorb Systems. His medical product manufacturing company, which increases hygiene and safety in health care facilities around the world, has had a dramatic effect locally as well. It hires veterans and people in need of second chances, bolstering the North Philadelphia neighborhood DiSorb calls home.

As his business has grown, so have McLaughlin’s connections to the neighborhood in which DiSorb has been located since 2006. Most of his employees live within blocks of the headquarters, an 80,000-square-foot facility, and many may have had trouble finding work because of military service-related disabilities or criminal records.

**Serviceman, student and CEO**

McLaughlin’s own career got a kick-start when he enlisted in the US Navy at the age of 20. After four years as a gunner’s mate and as a search-and-rescue diver, McLaughlin was honorably discharged with a back injury in 1987. He then enrolled at Villanova. “The discipline and maturity that I developed in the Navy, combined with the desire to learn, had a profound impact on my Villanova experience,” he says. “I received a great education, loved the culture of the school and did better academically than I ever had.”


In June 2016, the veteran-owned company completed a $1.5 million expansion project, installing a second high-speed production line and enlarging the state-of-the-art facility. Five employees have been added, and 75 percent of the 23 staff members are veterans. “The new system can produce enough solidifier to meet the entire US demand,” says McLaughlin, DiSorb’s CEO.

“This year, we expect to more than triple sales and add more employees.”

DiSorb’s solidifiers, sold under two brand names, help health care facilities comply with federal regulations, reduce potential exposure to blood-borne pathogens and save money. SafeSorb® is a fluid solidifier, designed to be preloaded in an empty suction canister before a medical procedure starts. SuperSolid Plus® solidifies and disinfects liquid medical waste so that treated canisters can be disposed of as municipal solid waste in most states, significantly reducing transportation and disposal costs.

In 1998, McLaughlin started DiSorb Systems.

In December, DiSorb held its first Criminal Records Expungement Fair for the community. Seventy veterans turned out to begin their applications, assisted by nonprofit attorneys. The next day, about 110 queries came in, so the company plans to host a second fair. “Lives change when an arrest record is expunged,” McLaughlin says. “Employees have a generous benefits package, training programs and a gym.

**We believe it’s important to take care of our vets, and we live that philosophy.” —Ted McLaughlin Jr.**

The company helps them to open checking accounts, improve their reading and earn GEDs. “As a result,” says McLaughlin, “we get higher quality work, lower turnover and happy employees.”

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Perhaps the biggest economic impact has been management’s commitment to hiring veterans, former prisoners and local residents who have difficulty finding work. “We always hire vets first,” McLaughlin says. “We believe it’s important to take care of our vets, and we live that philosophy.”

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**Investing in the community**

By moving DiSorb’s operations to a section of North Philadelphia that is designated a Historically Underutilized Business Zone, McLaughlin spurred the neighborhood’s economic development. HUBZone and Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business certifications help the company qualify for preferential access to federal procurement opportunities. “When we purchased a city block, we did a lot of work to improve the building, and that improves the neighborhood,” he says. “We also help the city’s tax base by generating more revenue.”

DiSorb employees Everton Blair, William Moyes and Justin Harris are military veterans who also live in the North Philadelphia neighborhood where the company is headquartered.