



Hattiesburg firm makes its mark in environmental testing

By Raymond Reeves

The latest Adidas advertisement has a picture of Muhammad Ali standing over a vanquished opponent. The ad includes a quote: “Impossible is not a fact, it is an opinion. Impossible is nothing.”

In the labs at Bonner Analytical in Hattiesburg, a poster of that ad is hanging on a wall. It seems rather appropriate. Not only is Bonner Analytical in a business that deals with the seemingly impossible on a regular basis, the company started in a small trailer – one that was previously used by Ali himself.

An environmental testing agency, Bonner Analytical works with a wide variety of clients – from individuals who want to have their home tested for something particular, to governmental projects for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

“Bonner came about in 1981,” said Mike Bonner, the founder and CEO of Bonner Analytical. “I had an idea that there was room in the marketplace for an environmental testing company that was really dedicated to doing high quality environmental testing. There was one little Indian back in those days – me. I collected the samples, performed the tests, typed the reports and sent the invoices out. Our first laboratory was an eight-foot wide-by-16-feet long trailer, that, incidentally, had previously been used by a movie company from California when they filmed a made-for-TV movie starring Muhammad Ali. It was his makeup trailer. We went from that humble beginning to (currently) about 30 employees.”

Over the next 15 years, the company went through several moves and growth, and even survived a fire. It was the change and expansion of the industry, however, that led Bonner to seek new avenues for his company.

Bonner Analytical, led by Bonner’s son, Christopher, worked towards and eventually landed a governmental contract with the Environmental Protection Agency. The EPA was looking at six new and six expiring contracts. In their monthly inspections of those 12, the EPA rated Bonner Analytical the highest-performing testing agency in the country – every month – after Bonner Analytical came into the program, according to Bonner.

Bonner and his company have also served as a consultant in, among other areas, the legal field. The “feather in their cap,” as Bonner puts it, was one trial whose result (because of Bonner Analytical’s work) led to the EPA changing how they test for certain items.

Due to the increasing technological needs of the lab, Bonner Analytical has opened a new, seemingly unrelated, branch of its company. Jeremy Graves – who got his start at 15, assisting his father, a Navy cryptographer – began working with Bonner Analytical as their computer guru, helping maintain the company’s ever-growing computer center, as well as researching and implementing new products and software that could be beneficial to the lab. Graves is now the full-time IT business manager for the organization, and when he’s not working with Bonner Analytical’s systems, he consults and installs new and upgraded systems for schools and businesses around the area. “I started in June 2003 and already have over 20 clients for IT training and implementation,” Graves said. Graves and Bonner Analytical are partners with CISCO and MicroSoft, making him very valuable in the computer marketplace.

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In response to their increased workload across the state, the laboratory has recently opened a branch in Meridian, which goes along with Environmental Contracting Services, an aquatic bioassay laboratory purchased five years ago. This acquisition made Bonner Analytical “the most full-service laboratory in the state of Mississippi,” Bonner said. “We’re the only lab in the state that does all of the standard chemical environmental testing under one roof, and also does the biological testing.” ✦

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