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Manufacturers Can Prosper In Connecticut



Superfinished spiral bevel gear teeth are seen on a component made by Aero Gear of Windsor. (Courtesy Aero Gear / June 25, 2012)

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Twenty-first-century entrepreneurs with a vision of establishing a manufacturing legacy probably wouldn't consider locating a fledgling business in Connecticut — a state often perceived as having high taxes and a tough climate for business.

But it can be done. Successfully.

Today, Aero Gear, a company I founded with one employee, is celebrating its 30th year in business with a trip to England in July to participate in the massive sales effort that accompanies the world renowned Farnborough Air Show.

It was encouraging to see a recent report from the [Connecticut Business and Industry Association](#) and New-Haven based DataCore Partners saying that our state's manufacturing sector has begun to grow. Connecticut today has about 1,000 more factory jobs than in 2010 and we are home to some 5,000 manufacturers employing 166,000 people.

To others starting a manufacturing business, I say, consider Connecticut. Seriously. Yes, it's true that the CBIA-DataCore study says we rank 30th in competitiveness. But we have something not found elsewhere: Yankee ingenuity.

And we offer educational programs that work. Within three months of their graduation from the manufacturing sequence at **Asnuntuck Community College**, 90 percent of the students have been hired in their chosen field. Not a bad placement record in a tough economy.

The Asnuntuck curriculum, and those like it at other community colleges in Connecticut, is in need of expansion. The CBIA noted that state manufacturers report having 1,000 job openings they can't fill because they can't find the skilled, qualified workers they need. What are 1,000 jobs worth to the state? Surely the cost of expanding the needed educational programs will be more than paid for by the tax revenue generated by 1,000 people in new jobs.

Connecticut also has a spirit of camaraderie that is unique. How many other states have competing companies working together to generate new business? Aerospace Components Manufacturers, an association created under the state's aegis, is composed of dozens of companies that are typically competitors.

Working together as a network, association member companies collectively offer broader capabilities than they could as individuals and help capture new business opportunities for Connecticut's aerospace industry.

A number of these companies, including Aero Gear, will join together at the international air show at Farnborough to try to win business. We're still competitors, of course, but we also recognize that new business for one of us sooner or later will lead to new business for us all.

Manufacturing in America has always been competitive. But now it is even more so, particularly as other nations subsidize manufacturing industries viewed as economically critical. To stay in business, we can't simply do things the way they have always been done. We have to improvise and adapt our processes to a changing marketplace. That is true for individual companies as well as how our entire state approaches economic development.

The state Department of Economic and Community Development, through the **Connecticut Center for Advanced Technology**, again has taken the lead in bringing state firms together to highlight Connecticut manufacturing capabilities to the world's aerospace industries. The dozen or so smaller companies like ours simply could not afford to be present individually at Farnborough.

Other states will have displays, of course. But they will be represented by government economic development officials. Connecticut is one of the few states that organized manufacturers themselves to highlight capabilities. And, if the past is any indication, banding together is likely to lead to new opportunities in the critical overseas aerospace market.

Individually, the 14 companies participating would seem inconsequential next to the international behemoths also exhibiting at this biannual trade show. As a group, however, these companies will make a significant impression and will show potential international customers they can come to Connecticut for a wide range of assemblies needed for their aircraft.

When Aero Gear was established 30 years ago, international air shows were not even a consideration. But decades in Connecticut have proved that it is possible to be a successful manufacturer and you can create a legacy in manufacturing in our state.

*Douglas Rose is the founder and president of **Windsor**-based Aero Gear Inc*