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Whitcraft, UConn working on low-cost ventilator prototype



HBJ FILE PHOTO *Whitcraft Group is headquartered in Eastford.*

[By Sean Teehan](#)

Eastford aeroparts manufacturer the Whitcraft Group has teamed up with engineers at the University of Connecticut to make low-cost ventilators that could serve as a backstop for healthcare facilities short on the lifesaving devices amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

By the beginning of next week, Whitcraft will likely finish a prototype of the ventilator employees are building in the company's South Windsor plant, which the company could manufacture for about \$2,500 apiece, said Chief Operating Officer Steve Ruggiero. They typically cost as much as \$50,000 to buy, he said.

If healthcare officials approve the prototype, Whitcraft could begin filling orders, Ruggiero said, but it's too early to tell who would buy them and how many the company could make.

"In essence we would be a production source and [UConn] would be a design source," Ruggiero said.

The partnership with UConn came about when Connecticut Chief Manufacturing Officer Colin Cooper approached Whitcraft -- for which Cooper served as CEO until last year -- with the idea, Ruggiero said.

Since concerns arose about possible shortages of ventilators and other protective gear for healthcare workers caring for COVID-19 patients, Cooper has played a match-making role, connecting manufacturers looking to adjust production to make needed equipment, and healthcare facilities in need of that equipment.

"I just felt that this ventilator development project fit exceptionally well with the skill set and abilities of the people [at Whitcraft]," Cooper said.