

Drones, helicopters land in Sterling Heights as makers talk business needs

By [Chad Halcom](#)

Published: March 10, 2015

Michigan makers of small aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles could generate new supply chain manufacturing and service business for local companies, who may be more accustomed to seeking that business elsewhere.

The **Michigan Aerospace Manufacturers Association** hosted a “Meet Michigan’s Aerospace OEMs” conference Monday at its regular membership meeting, at the **Defense Corridor Center for Collaboration and Synergy** in Sterling Heights.



Association executive director Gavin Brown estimates 75 executives from at least 60 different companies among its more than 200 member businesses attended the event.

Among those on hand were President-CEO Tracy Biegler and other executives of **Enstrom Helicopter Corp.**, based at Twin County Airport in Menominee, which flew one of its Turbine 480B series helicopters to and from the conference along 14 Mile Road.



“We have a very good possibility of growing the number of aircraft we’re manufacturing,” said Biegler, who said the company expects to ship about 39 turbine and piston-powered helicopters to various customers this year.

“(So) my choices come down to continuing to invest in the infrastructure in Menominee, and investing in capital and people to grow the business, or looking for a supply chain solution.”

The company, which employs more than 200 people in the western Upper Peninsula, has built small and versatile training helicopters for years as well as some used for agriculture, TV news media, and for government customers in Indonesia, Peru, Pakistan and elsewhere. Enstrom has been a subsidiary of China-based **Chongqing General Aviation Co.** since December 2012.

Also on hand to discuss their business needs Monday were President-CEO John Rimaneli and Sales and Flight Operations Director Todd Sedlak, of **Detroit Aircraft Corp.**, based at **Detroit City Airport**.

Rimaneli and Sedlak said the company makes customized UAVs or drone aircraft for education customers, and is also an assembler of the **Lockheed Martin Corp.**-designed Indago vertical takeoff and landing quadcopter.

The **Defense Manufacturing Assistance Program**, administered by University of Michigan on behalf of the federal **Office of Economic Adjustment**, also gave a presentation on services it provides to defense contractors to cope with new federal budget constraints.

Brown said it was the first time the state Association had hosted an event focusing on Michigan-based aircraft manufacturers, to highlight their current and future contracting needs, to local companies that might otherwise seek customers among the aerospace giants headquartered out of state.