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## GRBJ REPORT ON WZZM NEWS

### Aerospace Fund May Encourage New Work

Pete Daly

A Comstock Park injection molding business understands the value of solidifying its business in sectors outside of the automotive industry, and company officials may see such an opportunity through a new source of state funding that targets the aerospace industry.

Todd Finley, vice president at Commercial Tool & Die, said the company has been considering aerospace work "for a long time," mainly because it has done some small machining jobs for aerospace contractors in the past.

The new state budget recently approved by the Michigan Legislature includes \$500,000 to help manufacturers in Michigan — particularly automotive suppliers — qualify for and win contracts in the aerospace industry.

Craig Wolff, vice president of the Michigan Aerospace Manufacturers Association formed a few months ago with offices in Ada, said the aerospace industry "cannot build enough components for all the planes people are ordering all over the world. It's the exact opposite problem of the automotive" industry in Michigan.

In late October, aircraft manufacturer Boeing announced that the first deliveries of its new 787 Dreamliner will be delayed, due in part to a shortage of parts from suppliers. The Dreamliner has been ordered by more than 50 airlines worldwide and is "the most successful commercial airplane launch in history," according to CNNMoney.com.

Gavin Brown, president of MAMA, said the different sectors of the aerospace industry in the U.S. are all "on an upswing at the same time." He said aerospace production is expanding — "probably above 12 percent a year."



According to Wolff, the appropriation by the Michigan Legislature provides \$250,000 to MAMA to organize and promote aerospace manufacturing in Michigan, plus another \$250,000 to help qualified Michigan manufacturers achieve AS9100 certification, the quality standard that has been adopted for the aerospace industry.

Wolff said legislators who worked to add the \$500,000 to the budget were Sen. Mark Jansen, R-Grand Rapids, and Reps. Michael Sak, D-Grand Rapids, and Bill Huizenga, R-Zeeland. Wolff said the \$250,000 allocated to MAMA is a "one-time grant."

Wolff said achieving AS9100 certification is not an easy thing for any company. It involves training of employees at an estimated cost of \$12,000 to \$15,000, and takes from six to nine months. He said that probably fewer than a couple dozen Michigan companies have AS9100 certification already.

Brown said it has not been determined yet which organization in Michigan will help facilitate the AS9100 training. He said it would not be the MAMA.

He said "three or four" aerospace orders are expected to be placed soon with Michigan manufacturers but he is prohibited from releasing details about those orders. He indicated some involve government security requirements.

Seventeen companies in Michigan are already members of MAMA, according to Brown.

"We will fill out to 36 companies," said Brown. "We don't want to have an association where we have hundreds of companies. We want to have three companies per discipline" within the aerospace industry. He said there are 12 general disciplines or product types in aerospace, and when all three MAMA companies in a given discipline are working at full capacity, then they would recruit a new MAMA member in that discipline.

Brown is the former international sales manager at MSP Aviation Inc., in Bloomington, Ind., which has been producing parts for aircraft manufacturers for 60 years.

Commercial Tool & Die joined MAMA last summer, according to Finley. So did subsidiary CG Plastics, a small injection molding business.

Finley said Commercial Tool & Die's work is "95 percent automotive."

"We're not looking to get out of the automotive business by any means. We're looking to diversify our business, to be stronger," he

said.

Automotive has been "a difficult business for us the last few years," said Finley. "We've seen a significant amount of our business go offshore — to China, to low-cost countries. We've seen many of our competitors go out of business."

Commercial Tool & Die employs 135 people. While its level of employment has been "pretty stable" recently, according to Finley, the number has gone down about 10 percent over the last few years.

In order to qualify for aerospace contracts, management at Commercial Tool & Die knows the company has to be AS9100 compliant, which it currently is not. The company has been ISO9001 compliant for about 10 years, however.

The company was founded in 1954, and plans to stick around, said Finley.

"We haven't even seen a request to quote yet from aerospace. This is really early," he said. **BJX**

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