

WESTFIELD

4 WMass firms receive \$556K in grants



Susan Kasa, owner of Boulevard Machine & Gear Inc. in Westfield, stands in front of a new Verticle Machining Center the company was able to purchase through grants from the Massachusetts Manufacturing Accelerate Program. (Don Treeger / The Republican)

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By Jim Kinney

Boulevard Machine to use \$95,838 for new machine tooling equipment

Four Western Massachusetts employers — including one in Westfield doing business with SpaceX — shared in more than \$556,000 of the \$2.1 million in grants awarded last week to a total of 13 manufacturers across the state.

“Space has been huge for us,” said Susan Kasa, president of Boulevard Machine of Westfield. “We’re just looking to continue growing.”

Boulevard Machine got its coveted vendor code as a SpaceX supplier in December. It makes parts for the legs the Elon Musk company’s spacecraft use when they lands back on Earth.

It also does work with a partner company for Blue Origin, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos’ space venture. General Dynamics is also a customer.

Boulevard will use its \$95,838 grant to purchase new machine tooling equipment to meet demand from the space sector, allowing the company to reduce multiple tasks down to a single operation, according to a news release. Kasa said Boulevard has 25 employees and has not had difficulty hiring of late.

The grants are from the Massachusetts Manufacturing Accelerate Program, announced by Housing and Economic Development Secretary Mike Kennealy and managed by the Center for Advanced Manufacturing at MassTech Collaborative.

Other Western Massachusetts recipients are:

- Advance Welding/Kielb Welding Enterprises in Springfield, with \$250,000. The award allows the company to purchase electron beam and laser beam welding chambers.
- Guardair Corp. in Chicopee, with \$145,200. Guardair is a manufacturer of pneumatic tools and accessories used for industrial cleaning. The grant will fund the purchase of molds, fixtures and tooling critical to minimizing component costs for the production of a new product.
- Hi-Tech Mold & Tool in Pittsfield, with \$75,000. The company is buying a new milling machine. It is a contract manufacturer in the aerospace, defense, medical and industrial industries that has secured new contracts from Pratt & Whitney and L3 Harris. L3Harris has the old Kollomorgen operation Northampton.

A full list of recipients is at the masstech.org website.

Tom Tremblay, president of Guardair Corp., said the company’s new product line is more efficient, quieter and saves its customers money. The company sells



Kyrylo Malov of Springfield, a quality assurance technician at Boulevard Machine & Gear Inc. in Westfield, takes precise measurements of a part. (Don Treeger / The Republican)

nationwide into a range of industries: pulp and paper, woodworking and manufacturing. To do this it needs tools, molds and other equipment. The company has 60 employees.

Christopher Kielb owns Advance Welding with his sister, Melinda Mitton, having taken over 15 years ago from their parents, who founded in 1978. Late in 2021, they bought another company — KTI Inc. of East Windsor, Connecticut — and moved it, its equipment and 10 employees to its headquarters in Springfield. The purchase brings Advance Welding into the business of electron beam and laser beam welding.

“We are going to be a standout company across the county,” Kielb said.

Kielb said he’s working on getting a tax-increment finance agreement from the city to expand the 23-person company’s headquarters on Brookdale Drive.

Funding for the program came from “An Act Enabling Partnerships For Growth,” legislation signed by Gov. Charlie Baker in 2021.

According to the state, recipients have to prove progress to get the final payment. They must submit a detailed final equipment list, accomplishments to date, and a report with expected outcomes including job growth, business growth, impact on market and capabilities, and collaboration with partners.

One year following payment, a report must be submitted to MassTech to report on results compared to expected outcomes, said spokesman Brian Noyes.

The program aims to co-invest in small- to medium-sized manufacturers to better prepare their businesses to meet the demands of “Industry 4.0,” according to a news release. That includes the innovation-driven production methods powered by smart technologies such as data analytics, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, automation and connected technologies to stay competitive.

“Massachusetts manufacturers continue to play an important role for our economy, both here in Massachusetts but also nationally, where they’re contributing to critical sectors such as energy, defense and healthcare,” Baker said in a statement. “Through these MMAP grants, we are bolstering 13 companies through infrastructure investments that will drive innovation, increase efficiency and boost job growth across the state.”

“The MMAP program highlights Massachusetts companies that represent the next wave of innovators, which are also using these gains to grow output and new jobs,” said Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito. “For many of the workers, these new tools will move them away from repetitive tasks and allow them to focus on higher-value skills, driven by these technology investments.”



Kristian C. Kasa, a CNC programmer at Boulevard Machine & Gear Inc. in Westfield, checks the progress of a part being made. (Don Treeger / The Republican)