

# Aerospace: Companies Urged To Collaborate

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June 13 2002

Connecticut's aerospace manufacturers should consider collaborating to bid on bigger contracts, invest in new projects or even buy other companies, one of the state's top analysts has recommended to an industry group.

"You have to go on the attack," Mark A. Bobbi told members of the Aerospace Component Manufacturers. "There is business out there. Let's go find it."

Manufacturing in central Connecticut is dominated by companies that make components for jet engines and power-generation turbines. Both industries are declining because of a long-term shift in work to overseas companies and because of short-term business cycles.

Bobbi, a former Pratt & Whitney business analyst who has his own consulting firm in Prospect, is helping the manufacturers figure out how to respond.

He told them Tuesday evening during a presentation in Windsor, that smaller companies are being swallowed up or merging because of global consolidation.

The Connecticut contractors might have an easier time competing if they join forces, too, Bobbi said, through mergers, joint ventures or acquisitions.

As an example, he said the Connecticut companies might win more work from European manufacturers by making a strategic acquisition there.

The Connecticut companies, once fierce competitors, are already starting to work together on training, marketing and business referrals through the Aerospace Component Manufacturers.

About 200 people - representing 44 of the 45 member companies - were on hand for Tuesday's meeting, a "trade show" in a ballroom at the Windsor Marriott.

The purpose was to acquaint members with the capabilities of each other's shops.

They didn't immediately react to Bobbi's comments but had acknowledged earlier that they need to work more closely.

Executive Director Allen Samuel said group members are focusing on strategies for getting beyond the next few years. They plan, for example, to apply for a federal grant that would help cover the cost of marketing Connecticut's manufacturing capabilities to

potential customers in Europe.

The group also has launched a "branding campaign" to identify Connecticut manufacturers as a unit and is working with Bobbi to identify potential work.

Bobbi said possible markets include solar power, smaller power-generation turbines and equipment for oil drilling in Russia.

Douglas B. Rose, co-owner of Aero Gear Inc. in Windsor and a founding member of the manufacturing group, said finding new business is the next priority.

Steve Prout of Alpha Q Inc. in Colchester agreed.

"It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out things are tough," he said. "You've got to have additional business. Otherwise there's consequences."

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