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**Connecticut's Aerospace Components Manufacturers Cluster
Awarded \$212,500 for Pilot Program
*Funds to Boost Competitiveness of 18 Member Companies***

HARTFORD - On behalf of 18 of its member companies, the Aerospace Components Manufacturers (ACM) cluster is the first to be awarded a \$212,500 federal grant to help small and mid-size manufacturers enhance their competitive position through the employment of progressive manufacturing practices. The grant will be matched with private-sector investments, bringing the funding total to \$425,000.

"ACM members value progressive manufacturing," explained L. Stephen Prout, President of ACM, and President of Alpha Q, Inc. "They recognize its implementation as a discriminator in the worldwide aerospace marketplace."

Under the direction of the Governor's Council on Economic Competitiveness and Technology and administered by the state Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) and CERC (formerly called the Connecticut Economic Resource Center), the project is part of a sweeping \$1.2 million initiative funded by the U.S. Economic Development Administration and matching state and private investments. The overall initiative focuses primarily on the following three paths towards greater economic competitiveness for Connecticut's manufacturers:

- Building high-performance workplaces using progressive manufacturing methods
- Providing essential resources for small and mid-size companies via a manufacturing center
- Stimulating technology transfer through greater synergy between businesses and colleges/universities

"This grant is important because it will allow companies the chance to implement new manufacturing practices that will boost productivity, and in turn, further increase their competitiveness in the marketplace," said DECD Commissioner James Abromaitis. "Given the well-documented challenges facing the state's manufacturing sector, this disbursement of funding couldn't come at a better time."

ACM plans to recruit seven more companies to participate in the program, for a total of 25 ACM participants, before its completion October 1, 2004. ACM hopes to achieve greater penetration of lean manufacturing principles among member companies already practicing and to expand the number of companies actively engaged in Lean Manufacturing.

The ACM cluster, currently comprised of 43 small to mid-size aerospace industry suppliers, has a mission to lead its members toward an expanded market presence based upon increased competitiveness obtained through the implementation of lean management principles and practices, workforce skills development and member networking to offer broader capabilities than could be offered individually. ACM helps capture new business opportunities for Connecticut's aerospace industry. For more information, visit www.aerospacecomponents.org.

DECD is the lead state agency for economic and community development activities and oversees the implementation of the Industry Cluster Initiative on behalf of the Governor's Council on Economic Competitiveness and Technology. Funded by 10 of the state's utility and telecommunications companies in partnership with state government, CERC is a nonprofit company specializing in economic development and marketing for local, regional, state and utility entities, and assists DECD in promoting the state as a competitive business location. For more information, visit www.decd.org and www.cerc.com. For more details about Connecticut's Industry Cluster Initiative, visit www.YouBelongInCT.com.

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