Blanket Business Takes Flight

When flying at high altitude, you’ll want a blanket to keep you warm in sub-zero temperatures, but not the kind from a flight attendant. Protective insulation blankets go into the fuselage walls of commercial and military aircraft, and the Macon operation of The Boeing Company wanted to start making them for the aerospace giant’s C-17 Globemaster 3, getting a slice of the business going to a Mexico supplier.

Realizing that fabricating such blankets required knowledge of cutting and sewing—not part of the facility’s sheet metal skills—the plant manager contacted Georgia Tech’s Economic Development Institute (EDI) for assistance. Staff experienced in textiles suggested possible machinery applications, arranged for Boeing representatives to visit local textile manufacturers and helped with equipment research and supplier selection.

Boeing Macon used EDI’s assistance as the basis for its business plan to win a limited production contract for C-17 blankets, and started production in summer 2001. With purchase of equipment recommended by EDI, production has since expanded to require eight employees and 6,000 feet of manufacturing space. Macon now delivers 20 percent of the C-17’s insulation blankets and plans to expand that portion as well as win orders from commercial airlines. 478/751-6362

Getting SHARP

For more than 20 years, Georgia Tech has run a program for the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) in which the university’s industrial health and safety experts help small and mid-size firms make their workplaces safer for employees. The no-cost assistance ranges from machine guarding to repetitive-motion injuries to indoor air quality.

In 2000, OSHA inaugurated a new aspect called SHARP (Safety and Health Achievement Recognition Program). It relieves exemplary worksites from random OSHA inspections, and can make firms more attractive to customers and more competitive in pursuing contracts. Georgia Tech assists in such areas as hazard identification, safety and health policy, training and leadership.

Two Georgia firms are nearing final approval for SHARP status—Phoenix Stamping in Atlanta and Hydrochem in Holly Springs—and four other Georgia Tech client companies are in the process of doing so. 404/894-3589

Travel Trends II

Best practices in tourism highlighted the second annual Travel Trends conference Oct. 1 in Macon. The daylong event, cosponsored by Georgia Tech’s Economic Development Institute, drew more than 100 attendees representing hotels, attractions, chambers of commerce, convention and visitors bureaus, and government agencies across the state.

The keynote presentation was derived from a guidebook on tourism best practices nationwide recently written by EDI’s Rich Harrill. The purpose of the book, and the keynote address, was to share successful approaches with Georgia tourism practitioners who can adopt and apply these tools and techniques locally.

Knowledge Is Power

From April through October, the University System of Georgia’s “Knowledge Is Power” tour went to each of Georgia’s 12 economic development regions. Business and civic leaders had the opportunity to meet Chancellor Thomas C. Meredith, learn about USG services provided to Georgia communities and tell USG leaders how the system can better support their region’s economic growth.

Eight of the 12 events were coordinated by Georgia Tech’s Economic Development Institute. EDI staff identified and secured speakers for local success stories, facilitated the programs and encouraged client companies to attend and support the KIP effort. www.icapp.org
ATDC Gets New Headquarters

The Advanced Technology Development Center (ATDC), Georgia Tech’s business incubator, is getting a new home.

Next summer, ATDC will move its headquarters from Tenth Street to Georgia Tech’s new Technology Square development on Fifth Street. The 122,000-square foot ATDC facility is part of nearly $400 million in new construction in Midtown Atlanta’s Fifth Street corridor between the Downtown Connector and the Biltmore Hotel.

In addition to traditional start-up companies, the new building will also house investors, service providers and “landing party” ventures – new product development or start-up groups from established companies.

The new facility will allow ATDC to offer an unprecedented level of services and flexibility in what will be one of Atlanta’s most prestigious addresses for technology companies. Powered by the companies, investors, service providers and Georgia Tech’s growing presence, the area will provide a dynamic environment for entrepreneurship.

www.atdc.org/atdcletter/oct02/centergy.html

Back on the Trail

An east Georgia group is back on the trail of tourism, and Georgia Tech played a major role in the endeavor.

The Woodpecker Trail Association wants to revive a favorite scenic byway from the mid-1900s, one once billed as the “fastest route to Florida’s west coast.” In Georgia, the Woodpecker Trail follows state Highway 127 through 10 counties from Richmond to Charlton.

Staff in Tech’s Economic Development Institute studied regional tourism assets, as well as spending patterns by automobile pleasure travelers along similar routes in the state and nation. EDI determined the route has sufficient assets – especially for history buffs and outdoors enthusiasts – to develop the trail and made several recommendations for such development.

In September, representatives from counties along the trail met to discuss incorporation, bylaws, Web site, marketing/promotional materials and other matters related to those recommendations. Funding from the Georgia Rural Economic Development Center in Swainsboro will enable EDI to continue assisting with revival of the Woodpecker Trail.

www.ceds.gatech.edu

Around the State

■ In Hancock County, EDI staff helped St. Gobain Glass develop a new manufacturing facility. Assistance involved support with project planning software, a lean manufacturing assessment, evaluation of machinery and equipment, and technical coaching related to international quality standards. The plant expects to employ 50 people initially, and capital expenditure exceeds $4 million.

■ EDI staff coached employees of Mestek, Inc. in lean manufacturing techniques, which addressed plant layout, organization and continuous flow. Upon implementing a pilot program in one department, the Wrens manufacturer of heaters, dampers and air-conditioning systems cut lead times and work-in-process inventory each by 60 percent.

■ The Georgia Tech Research Institute partnered with East Central Technical College in Fitzgerald to align high school courses from five counties with new ECTC offerings in telecommunications and technology; the goal being a pool of local skilled workers for area industrial/technology parks. The ongoing project recently won an international award from the Learning Resource Network.

For more information: Assistance to Georgia businesses, communities and economic developers: www.edi.gatech.edu • Assistance to start-up technology companies: www.atdc.org • Commercialization assistance to Georgia Tech faculty: www.venturelab.gatech.edu • Applied research: www.gtri.gatech.edu • Continuing education: www.gtconted.org • Georgia Tech home page: www.gatech.edu

Georgia Tech’s Regional Office Network

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