



# The Republican.

## Award aids machine industry

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CHICOPEE - Precision machining companies in Western Massachusetts received a huge boost on Thursday when it was announced the Regional Employment Board of Hampden County has been awarded \$500,000 to support the Precision Manufacturing Regional Alliance Project.

The announcement was made at Hoppe Tool Inc., on 1st Avenue, by state Secretary of Housing and Economic Development Daniel O'Connell. The award was given by the John Adams Innovation Institute, the economic development division of the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative.

"It's a huge award," said J. William Ward, executive director of the Regional Employment Board of Hampden County. "This funding is what I would call a venture capital investment in the precision machining industry in Western Massachusetts."

Ward said the \$500,000 will be matched with \$250,000 from private sources.

"This is an industry that is growing and prospering in Massachusetts and particularly in this area," O'Connell said.

The money will address four main objectives.

Helping local companies strengthen their relationships with local organizations to address industry issues, including workforce development and identifying new market opportunities.

Assisting the industry in finding new markets by enhancing its infrastructure for technology development and integration through technology innovation forums and a pilot technology transfer program with the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

Providing engineering support to help companies adopt new technologies, improve productivity and expand the advanced manufacturing process.

Assessing the feasibility of developing a Center for Advanced Precision Manufacturing Technology.

It is expected that this effort will result in a sales increase of up to 4 percent, which would mean a total employment increase of up to 430 jobs in the industry in this area.

The initiative also includes working with Springfield Technical Community College and Holyoke Community College in building a better workforce development infrastructure.

"This focuses on the future of the industry itself," Ward said.

Ward said the precision machining industry in this area is strong and this new initiative will help maintain

that health and assist in its growth. The Western Massachusetts chapter of the National Tooling and Machine Association has 60 members, representing 3,000 to 4,000 workers.

"We have the flexibility to do some very creative things," said Patrick J. Larkin, director of the John Adams Innovation Institute. "Innovation is about conversation. It's about ideas. It's about leadership and taking risks."

Before announcing the grant award, surrounded by state and local officials, O'Connell met with a small group of industry and economic development leaders. A tour of Hoppe Tool followed.

Hoppe Tool is a longtime family-owned company that makes precision aircraft parts and various military products, along with the machines used to manufacture Gillette razors. The business is growing, with \$14 million in sales in 2007 and a projected \$28 million in sales this year. Employee numbers have grown from 55 to 95 in the past four years.

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