



National Science Foundation issues \$600,000 grant to foster cooperation between UMass, Hampden County employment board and National Tooling and Machining Association

By Jim Kinney

December 16, 2009, 2:20PM

SPRINGFIELD – When Edward T. Leyden, president of the Western Massachusetts Chapter of the National Tooling and Machining Association, toured laboratories at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, he said he saw things he thought were science fiction.

“They had speakers made out of plywood and you would have thought you were in the concert hall,” said Leyden, who is also president of Ben Franklin Design and Manufacturing in Agawam. “I asked to see what was behind the plywood and they said nothing’s back there, they had coated the plywood to make the speaker.”

Leyden’s group wants to have a hand in turning research projects such as that speaker first into prototypes and eventually into market-ready products. And they want to keep that work here in the Pioneer Valley.

“There are some really great things going on up there, I think it’s a crime to let it leave the state,” Leyden said.

Leyden’s group, University of Massachusetts Amherst Chancellor Robert C. Holub and the Regional Employment Board of Hampden County will sign a three-way agreement Thursday afternoon accepting a \$600,000 federal grant from the National Science Foundation aimed at fostering that cooperation. The event will be at the Museum of Springfield History which features exhibits on the technological breakthroughs of the region’s past, such as the Duryea automobile.

J. William Ward, executive director of the Regional Employment Board, said this federal grant grew from a \$500,000 grant the board received from the John Adams, Innovation Institute, part of the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, a quasi-public agency that fosters technology in state.

“We’re looking at ways that the machine tool industry can get current,” Ward said. “But also hoping to grow the industry and get it into markets.”

There are 230 machine shops in the region totaling more than 7,000 employees.

Leyden said his group has already picked four projects, including a new medical implant and a polymer science technology, for the program. He hopes to start working on one such project at his company next month.

“We can be helpful even in the design phase,” he said. “I saw things on my tour that I know we can improve.”