



Precise job training gives students edge

By The Republican Editorials

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Manufacturing in Western Massachusetts may not be the economic engine it once was, but there are recent indications the industry is poised for a resurgence.

Take Smith & Wesson, for example. The Springfield-based handgun manufacturer, founded in 1852 by Horace Smith and Daniel B. Wesson, reported a 50 percent sales increase in the quarter ended Oct. 31.

The company's future also looks bright. It has its sights trained on landing \$500 million in firearm orders from the Army, Air Force and Special Forces Command.

With more growth on the horizon, the old-line company wisely recognizes that it needs a new army of trained workers to call up for duty.

Fortunately, the company doesn't have to look very far for potential workers. Future precision machinists are increasing in numbers at the Roger L. Putnam Vocational Technical High School, which is only a few blocks from the gun maker's plant. The school, which began precision machining courses three years ago, has grown from nine students to 40.

Smith & Wesson has its eye on those students and has donated a \$100,000 state-of-the-art computer-controlled cutting machine to Putnam. It has also promised to supply \$250,000 worth of equipment to the school over the next five years.

Smith & Wesson is a company on the move having received orders this fall from police departments including Tampa, Fla. the North Carolina Highway Patrol, the Washington State Police and the Miami-Dade Police Departments. It has also extended its global reach, receiving orders from police agencies and militaries around the world.

As the company grows, opportunities for young precision machinists-in-training will also grow. And students at Putnam will have an edge in the job market when they graduate.

That's good news for Smith & Wesson, the students and the region's economy.

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