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Project helps manufacturers diversify

By Jim Stafford
For The Oklahoman

DURANT – Jim Willingham spoke loudly to project his voice over the roar of machinery on the busy manufacturing floor of KT Plastics Inc., located in the tiny Bryan County community of Calera just outside of Durant.

Automated machining equipment fabricated plastic into industrial parts as Willingham, KT Plastics general manager, discussed new markets the manufacturer expanded into in the wake of federal-state grant funding received through the Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science and Technology (OCAST).

“The grant has opened doors to international business for us,” Willingham said. “We are shipping parts to Singapore, we’ve sent parts to Australia, Ireland and the European Union. It has increased our worldwide presence, if you will.”

KT Plastics employs 21 people in a 38,000-square-foot plant, fabricating a wide variety of molded industrial parts such as bearings, bushings and seals used by the oil and gas and petrochemical industries. It also produces products for waste and recycling customers, air compressors, transportation, semiconductor, heavy equipment and other markets.

Grant funding KT Plastics received was part of an innovative project by OCAST to help oil and natural gas supply chain companies across 38 Oklahoma counties diversify and expand their markets thereby reducing the impact of future up and down cycles in the oil and gas industry. The counties were those hit hardest by the energy price decline in 2016.

OCAST received \$1 million from the federal Economic Development Administration (EDA), an arm of the U.S. Department of Commerce, and matched it with \$530,000 in state funds to support its Diversify Oklahoma initiative.

Small manufacturers receive an average of \$75,000 each to help them engage with the business, marketing and engineering services of the Oklahoma Manufacturing Alliance and the New Product Development Center at Oklahoma State University. These OCAST partner organizations also helped manufacturers involved in the EDA-funded grant to enhance their internet presence, provide training for employees and improve efficiency and global competitiveness.

In the case of KT Plastics, the EDA funding helped the company acquire a 3-D printer, receive training on computer-aided design software known as SolidWorks and redesign its internet site.

“We have seen a pickup in our internet contacts and sales through that new website,” Willingham said. “That’s been a tremendous asset to us.”

EDA grant funding had a

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SEE THE VIDEO

Visit Oklahoman.com to see a video about KT Plastic’s operations near Durant.



KT Plastics fabricates a wide variety of molded industrial parts such as bearings, bushings and seals used by the oil and gas and petrochemical industries. [PROVIDED]

Automated machining equipment fabricates plastic into industrial parts at the KT Plastics plant in Calera.
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similar impact on another Durant area manufacturer, AERO Component Repair LLC.

Founded 15 years ago by William Moskwa after a long career as an airframe and power plant mechanic for the airline industry, AERO Component Repair employs 10 people and provides turbine and turboprop component repair and overhaul services for the aviation and industrial turbine markets.

AERO Component Repair expanded into new turbine component repair markets in Romania, the United Arab Emirates, Australia and Mexico.

“The EDA grant has allowed us to reach more parts of the world and develop new customer relationships, as well as develop new applications and reinforce some that we are currently doing,” Moskwa said.

“We are pleased to see these Oklahoma small- and medium-size manufacturers reaching new customers across the globe as a result of the EDA investment,” said Michael Carolina, OCAST executive director. “That is bringing new revenues into our state and helping them diversify their operations so that future downturns in the oil and gas industry are not as devastating to these communities as they have been in the past.”

Jim Stafford writes about Oklahoma innovation and research and development topics on behalf of the Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science & Technology (OCAST).