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Electric Boat to hire 400: Growth at Quonset facility

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As the Quonset Business Park continues to develop as a key center of commerce in the state of Rhode Island -- attracting national business, expanding as a center of retail, industry, production and transport -- so does its promise to help spur economic recovery in the area. One crucial element in playing this important role is job growth. There continues to be good news in that arena.

Employment figures at Quonset have been climbing, 2,760 new jobs in the last five years alone. That number will continue to grow buoyed by the recent announcement by cornerstone resident General Dynamics Electric Boat that it will be adding 400 new workers. The company already employs 2,000 workers at Quonset.

The upcoming job openings at Electric Boat will cover a wide variety of trades associated with shipbuilding. The openings come as the corporation's Virginia-class submarine program ramps up production from one nuclear submarine a year to two.

Electric Boat's Quonset facility is responsible for building supermodules, which are sections approximately one-quarter the size of the 377-foot finished submarines.

The defense industry has long been an economic stronghold for Rhode Island and is proving to be a growing sector in this difficult economy. Thanks to federal investments and a restructuring of Navy commands, Rhode Island defense employment increased in Rhode Island in 2009, according to John Riendeau, the defense-industry manager for the Economic Development Corporation. According to the latest numbers, the defense industry employed 16,000 people in Rhode Island.

During the last five years, new companies have located at the Quonset Business Park and existing ones, including Electric Boat are growing.

Electric Boat, in addition to shifting more of its manufacturing work to Quonset, also invested more than \$30 million in improvements to expand and create efficiencies in its submarine construction process. The improvements came as EB expressed confidence in its ability to work with the Quonset Development Corp. (QDC) and in the capability of its Quonset facility. The company is currently retrofitting an existing building to further accommodate its expanding work at Quonset.

Electric Boat's expansion is one of many developments that maximize the value of the Business Park's waterfront property. Equipped with a variety of abilities and resources, and offering a unique location on the water, Quonset has been involved in transporting massive wind turbine parts, transporting cars to and from NORAD (one of the top ten auto ports in North America), and preparing to house the 250-foot research vessel Okeanos Explorer, NOAA first vessel dedicated to ocean exploration set to arrive at Quonset in July 2010.

The end result, according to Rear Admiral Cecil D. Haney, commander- Submarine Group Two, is a "... transformational leap forward in submarine technology and a revolution in the design and construction processes used to build submarines."

Speaking at an annual update on the company, Electric Boat President John P. Casey told

appointed and elected officials, including Governor Carcieri, that the company will be filling the new positions by the end of the year.

"The most important thing for economic recovery is jobs," Casey said.

There are still opportunities for new and expanding businesses at Quonset. We look forward to further growth as companies continue to recognize the quality of the business park and the state's strong valuable workforce.

Steven King, P.E., is the managing director for the Quonset Development Corp., North Kingstown.

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