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## Connecting Quonset companies with tools to help them thrive - by Steven King

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With more than 200 companies employing over 11,800 people, Quonset is Rhode Island's leading engine of economic development and job growth. The Quonset Development Corporation (QDC) is constantly looking for new ways to create jobs and help park businesses grow. That's why the QDC was happy to let Quonset tenants know about governor Gina Raimondo's Wavemaker Fellowship program, a valuable tool for Quonset businesses looking to attract and retain talent.

We often hear about the challenge of launching a career while managing student loan debt. The Wavemaker Fellowship helps local college graduates starting professional careers by assisting them with student loan repayment. Individuals selected to participate in the program receive fully refundable tax credits equal to the value of their minimum student payments. Fellows may benefit from these credits for up to four years. Additionally, the program connects Fellows to personal and professional development programs, life skills workshops, community investment opportunities and networking opportunities with other Fellows from throughout the state.

Currently ten Quonset businesses employ Wavemaker Fellows. These employees recently met for an event at the QDC where they discussed how the program has impacted their lives and the opportunities it has created. Tanios BouRamia, who works as a product line manager at Quonset tenant Coto Technology, told us about his experience.

"I've had offers and interest from other companies outside of Rhode Island," said Tanios. "The Wavemaker Fellowship is that thumb on the scale that makes the decision to stay and grow in Rhode Island that much easier to make. It gives me the freedom to continue investing in my local community and state economy. I'm proud to be a native Rhode Islander, and incredibly appreciative of everything this state has given me."

The Wavemaker Fellowship program was founded in 2015 and accepted its first round of applicants the following year. The program targets graduates looking to begin a career within a STEM or design field. Given that focus, Quonset businesses are a natural fit. Quonset is home to many advanced industry jobs that are moving the state forward. Just last year we celebrated the

construction of Finlays' new 28,000 s/f research and manufacturing space at Quonset Business Park.

"The Wavemaker Fellowship program provides an opportunity for STEM and design professionals in Rhode Island to start their careers without having to worry about affording student loan payments. Reducing the huge financial burden of student loan repayment lets them focus on what really matters – making a life and building a career in this great state. The program also supports recruitment and retention efforts of companies who are growing and hiring high-quality talent in these key fields. Each employee who fits the mold has the opportunity to earn this additional, free-to-the-employer, benefit- just because they work for a company in RI," said Jillian Butler, Wavemaker Fellowship director.

The Wavemaker Fellowship is just one way to attract and retain talent in Rhode Island. To ensure that our tenants can reach that talent, the QDC offers a free online job-posting tool. By sharing their open positions on QuonsetJobs.com, the more than 200 businesses at Quonset can advertise opportunities and connect with job seekers. The site also helps employers learn more about resources available to them in the state.

Since 2005, close to 5,000 jobs have been created within the Quonset Business Park. Quonset is dedicated to creating more jobs and sparking further economic growth for Rhode Island. Thanks to the Wavemaker Fellowship program, Quonset businesses are further equipped to succeed. We look forward to helping more of our tenant businesses grow so they can bring more jobs to Rhode Island.

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