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Manufacturing week highlights success of Quonset Business Park - by Steven King

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With over 12,000 jobs at more than 200 companies, Quonset Business Park is the leading engine of economic development and job creation in Rhode Island. Despite the economic uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, the strength of Quonset's manufacturing sector has ensured stable jobs for thousands of Rhode Islanders, and the sector is primed to continue growing.

The Rhode Island Manufacturers Association (RIMA) hosted a Manufacturing Week Virtual Kick Off conference on October 6th, which makes a conversation about Quonset's role as the state's manufacturing hub a timely one. The conference connected manufacturers with one another to leverage resources, products and services, and promote information sharing on industry trends and challenges. Quonset businesses were active at this conference, including Meister Abrasives, which offered their unique perspective in the Manufacturer Showcase session.

"RIMA is pleased to see the growth and major contribution that Quonset has made to the manufacturing sector," said RIMA executive director Dave Chenevert. "We have several RIMA members at Quonset such as Hexagon Manufacturing Intelligence, R&D Technologies and Supfina Machine Company. We recognize the positive impact that Quonset Business Park has on the success and growth of the sector. Quonset Business Park is a manufacturing success story in Rhode Island and companies across the state are fortunate to tap into the leadership and expertise there."

The Quonset Development Corp. (QDC) has maintained a strong focus on fostering the manufacturing industry at the business park throughout the pandemic. Here are some statistics that show the health of Quonset's manufacturing base:

- Quonset businesses employ nearly 7,000 Rhode Islanders in manufacturing jobs.
- Manufacturing jobs account for 59% of the employment at the park.
- 17% of all manufacturing jobs in Rhode Island are at Quonset.

- The average salary for manufacturing workers at Quonset is 11% higher than the statewide average.

RIMA's advocacy and the Manufacturing Week Conference are great resources for the industry in R.I. QDC is glad to partner with them, and our companies are available as a resource for any manufacturer facing challenges during these difficult times.

Looking to the future, there are promising signs of continued growth across Quonset's manufacturing sector.

1. Electric Boat, Quonset's largest employer, has started an aggressive hiring campaign to support the construction of the Columbia Class submarines, the next generation nuclear sub for the U.S. Navy. The company has on-boarded 100 people in the past several weeks, and expects to add nearly 1,000 more employees by the summer of 2021.

2. Two Quonset manufacturers have teamed up to help their customers achieve outstanding quality. As a company specializing in advanced abrasive solutions, Meister Abrasives has collaborated frequently with next-door neighbor Supfina Machine Co., which offers a range of abrasive machining solutions for manufacturers that need precise and fine surface finishes. In recent years, the companies have had success with their collaboration in developing specialized machines to help manufacture high-volume parts ranging from ceramic bearings for aerospace manufacturers to steel pump components for fuel injection manufacturers.

Both companies say their partnership has played a big role in their respective successes.

3. Hexagon Manufacturing Intelligence introduced a metal binder jetting (MBJ) simulation this fall that helps manufacturers reduce costs and lead times for production of complex metallic parts such as gears or turbine wheels. Hexagon is a global leader in sensor, software and autonomous solutions that use data to boost efficiency, productivity, and quality across the industrial and manufacturing industries.

The QDC team is excited to see additional hiring, collaboration, and new innovative products coming from our manufacturing companies.

No matter the economic realities, manufacturing will be an important part of our continued success at Quonset Business Park. As one of the leading industrial parks in the region, the QDC team is committed to creating a climate where manufacturing employment continues to grow at the Park and across Rhode Island.

Steven King, PE, is the managing director of the Quonset Development Corp., North Kingstown, R.I.