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SKED Helps Owingsville Man Puts His Knowledge to Work for Himself

OWINGSVILLE, Ky. – Bill Plutnick is creating digital models of a machine that caused an industrial accident resulting in someone's death. Using his models, experts can make an educated opinion as to the cause of the accident. This high-tech, forensic analysis isn't being done in a lab owned by a major corporation on the other side of the country. Plutnick is conducting this ground-breaking work from his own small shop in rural East Kentucky.

The New Jersey native made Owingsville his home 13 years ago when his wife accepted a position at Morehead State University. The mechanical engineer, designer and entrepreneur traveled around the state and country, working as an engineer for several large manufacturing and aerospace businesses, before he decided to begin his own business in the garage of his Bath County home.

At age 50, Plutnick has taken his mechanical engineering degree, 20-plus years of experience working for large companies in the field, and combined those two important factors with a great imagination and an inherited entrepreneurial spirit to start his own company, called Swiss Metrology, in tiny Owingsville, Ky. population 1,530.

Describing exactly what Plutnick does at Swiss Metrology takes a few minutes.

The metrology service company provides services to manufacturers enabling them to produce certified, high-quality products that meet or exceed the original design criteria. The company also provides engineers and designers with reverse engineering data on existing products for which data is not currently available.

"I use the best commercially available equipment and software applications to perform highly accurate measurement for manufacturing quality control, reverse engineering, and forensic analysis," explained Plutnick. "Basically, I measure stuff with digital equipment and a laser."



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But the University of Kentucky College of Engineering graduate didn't begin Swiss Metrology overnight. The business was developed utilizing his unique skills and perspective from working for large-scale businesses around the country. He conducted research to determine the need for such a service in Kentucky. He found that no one was providing this service in the region and learned the Central and East Kentucky region were rich with businesses who could utilize his skills. Determining that overhead costs could be kept low enough to allow his business to be competitive in any market, Swiss Metrology began taking form.

You may recognize the names of some of his customers: Toyota, Blue Star Plastics and Vogelsang Corporation in Mt. Sterling. Vogelsang Corporation Vice-President and General Manager Scott McKee says Plutnick's work has helped his company grow.

"We discovered Bill through the Mt. Sterling Chamber of Commerce," McKee said. "Swiss Metrology has provided our company with an excellent source of accurate, reliable measurement data. His company's flexibility and knowledge has been a huge asset in launching several of our new production tools."

Much of the work Swiss Metrology is doing in Owingsville is also being done in other parts of the nation and around the world through outsourcing, but it's Plutnick's goal to reverse that trend and keep the revenue right here in Kentucky. By doing this, he can create highly-skilled jobs in Kentucky, more specifically in East Kentucky.

With only three documented manufacturing or technology firms operating in Owingsville and an unemployment rate teetering between 9 and 10%, the small community could use the additional employment.

The industries using Swiss Metrology's high-tech engineering services are diverse and plentiful in the region. The automobile manufacturing industry is just one example.

"If you manufacture auto parts, you must comply with an industry wide standard and compile a report called a PPAP on the initial production run of the part. This report must be submitted to the customer for approval," Plutnick explains. "Part of the PPAP requires dimensional inspection and reporting on selected features for a specified number of samples pulled from the production run. You have a choice of buying equipment, software, hiring, and



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training your own people to do this, or outsourcing it to a company like mine that specializes in this.”

“If you are a large company that must measure these parts every day, then perhaps it makes sense for you to buy your own equipment and hire someone to do this. On the other hand, if you are a smaller operation, like many in our region, you only need to compile this report a few times a month and keeping this equipment and people on hand throughout the year is not cost effective. My company offers you a real cost effective solution,” he added.

But business plans, including cost projections and marketing strategies, aren’t taught in engineering school. Plutnick had to start at the beginning. For him, the beginning was enrolling in the Entrepreneurial SMARTS course, offered by Southeast Kentucky Economic Development Corporation. This 12-hour small business training class offered him the information he needed to get his business on track and his goals in focus. At the time, the closest SMARTS class offered was in Somerset, Ky. In October 2013, he traveled 200 miles to Somerset four times in one month to attend the SMARTS classes and received his certificate of completion.

SKED’s Small Business Training Specialist Pat Bradley conducts the SMARTS training and saw Plutnick’s intense desire to make his small business succeed.

“Quite often, folks who start small businesses have the technical skillset for that particular business. What they don’t have, and more often than not don’t realize they really need, is the skillset of business management,” said Bradley. “Bill Plutnick is one of those rare individuals who recognized early in his plans that he lacked those necessary skills critical for starting and successfully operating a small business. By participating in SKED’s Entrepreneurial SMARTS training program, he wisely invested his time and money in learning what he needed to know about business management before beginning Swiss Metrology to ensure his long-term success.”

Upon SMARTS graduation, Plutnick qualified for an SBA Micro Loan, through SKED, which he used to purchase new equipment and provide working capital for Swiss Metrology earlier this year. As part of the U.S. Small Business Administration loan, he receives technical assistance training from SKED staff in areas ranging from accounting to marketing.



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Plutnick's future plans for Swiss Metrology include building business partners for the long term, based on providing value, dependable service, and trust.

"I truly enjoy going out every day and learning what people are working on around the state and trying to come up with cost-effective solutions that will enhance their business," he said. "Sometimes I cannot. But when I can, it makes all the sleepless nights worth it."

SKED is a non-profit economic development organization and has been designated a Certified Development Corporation (CDC) by the U.S. Small Business Administration. The organization was formed 28 years ago by Fifth District Congressman Hal Rogers to create jobs in Southeast Kentucky.

Its corporate office is based in Somerset, with satellite locations in Morehead and Whitesburg to serve its 45-county service region. A staff of nine professionals works with business owners, small and large, to identify financing solutions to fund their location, expansion and working capital needs, and provide them the technical assistance and training the need to succeed.

For more information about SKED, visit our website: www.southeastkentucky.com or call (606) 677-6100.

CUTLINE: Bath County resident and small business owner Bill Plutnick is pictured in his shop in Owingsville. For more information about Swiss Metrology, visit www.swissmetrology.com.