

State aids defense suppliers

By Kathy Parrieh
staff writer

Getting in to see the nation's largest defense contractors isn't easy for a small supplier.

Today, though, representatives of 31 Michigan firms met in Los Angeles with purchasing agents for nine of the biggest. With the help of the Michigan Department of Commerce, this week they'll show their wares to such buyers as Hughes Aircraft, General Dynamics Corp., TRW, Rockwell International and Ford Aerospace.

"It's a chance to get noticed," said Dan Woolf, taking part for the third time in a state-sponsored mission. The trips have brought his Wayne-based Woolf Aircraft Products \$250,000 in sales of tubular exhaust systems, fuel and oil lines and breather tubes.

"The state gets us in the door. After that, it's how good a salesman you are."

STATE OFFICIALS and representatives from the Michigan firms traveled to Los Angeles to secure a bigger chunk of the multimillion-dollar Defense Department procurement budget.

Leaders of specialized manufacturing firms throughout the state will display their space technology and communication and defense systems to primary defense contractors.

The mission is designed to provide small businesses exposure to large California defense contractors.

From Feb. 25 to 27 they are scheduled to meet with Hughes, Ford, Garrett Air Research Corp.,

Blood pressure classes offered

Oakland County Health Department, in cooperation with American Heart Association, will offer a series of five blood pressure control classes to residents.

The free classes will be 2-4 p.m. on Wednesday, Feb. 27 to March 27, in the Oakland County Health Division's South Office, 27725 Greenfield, Southfield. Preregistration is required by calling 858-1280 or 424-7101.

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General Dynamics, Lockheed, McDonnell Douglas, Northrop, Rockwell and TRW. They also will talk with representatives of the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Navy and Small Business Administration.

"THIS MISSION will help target federal procurement dollars to our small businesses and will also greatly assist our effort to create jobs," said Gov. James J. Blanchard.

State Commerce Director Doug Ross said Michigan has lagged long enough in obtaining federal money.

"Initiatives like this one help our businesses gain the know-how they need to successfully win federal contracts," said Ross, former state senator from southern Oakland County.

THE LOS ANGELES trip is the second for the Commerce Department, which also took firms to San Jose, Calif., and Massachusetts. A "reverse event" brought government contractors to Detroit's Renaissance Center two years ago.

Fred Gramman, who leads the missions as director of Michigan's Office of Federal Procurement Assistance, said the goal is to "make a match" between state firms and big buyers. He said California firms get 25 percent of all defense contracts.

Dubbed the "Arsenal of Democracy" during World War II because of its aircraft production, Michigan firms have since fallen behind in defense contracts. Michigan still is home of the major tank producer — the U.S. Army Tank Automotive Command which does \$5-billion yearly business.

"FOR MANY YEARS Michigan industry was content to supply the auto industry and federal contracts took second place," said Gramman, adding that there are "lots of regulations" tied to defense work.

"Firms just didn't have the time and inclination," Michigan companies pay their own expenses for the state-sponsored events. Gramman's office coordinates everything, setting up sessions like the day-long meeting tomorrow with Hughes Aircraft and Ford Aerospace, a subsidiary of Ford Motor Co.

"The companies could do this themselves, but it

would take a lot more money and time. We just ease the way for them," he explained.

GRASMAN POINTS proudly to the success of Mid-America Engineering Corp., a Grand Rapids firm which was awarded a \$3.1-million contract by FMC Corp. of San Jose during a state mission there.

The contract — for refitting of wiring on a Marine amphibious vehicle — created 35 jobs and represented a major expansion for the firm.

But he admits that not all firms benefit from the venture. "We have no trouble recruiting as many firms as we can handle. But they recognize it's a gamble."

"It's a long-term proposition," added the director. He is thinking about future trips to Huntsville, Ala., a missile and space command center, and to Florida where aircraft electrical components are made.

"We've been successful enough to want to do it again."

TRI-COUNTY firms taking part in the mission are:

Oakland — Nucleus Corp., Madison Heights.
Wayne — Sun Plastic Coating in Plymouth, Woolf Aircraft Products Inc. in Wayne, Well Done Fabrication Inc. in Melvindale, and Omega Industries in Taylor.
Macomb — CBS Boring and Machine Co. in Fraser, Caratron Gear and Manufacturing Inc. in Warren, Dexter Aerospace Inc. in Fraser and Supreme Gear Inc. in Roseville.

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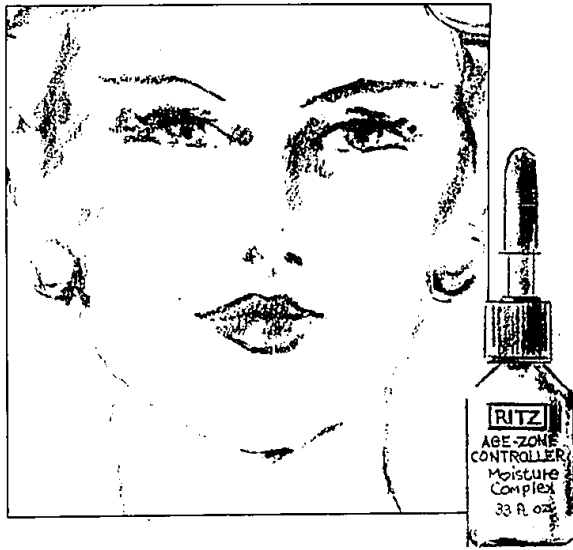
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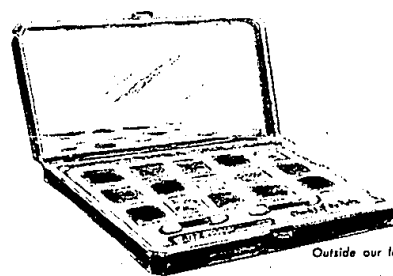
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