

BUSINESS

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Aviation cluster keeping busy in Central Oregon

By Cathy Carroll
The Bulletin

Economists and business experts theorize about the aviation manufacturing cluster model in Central Oregon and wonder whether such a cluster even exists.

A cluster is a group of businesses that locate close together to leverage expertise and bring together the supply chain for its industry.

In the meantime, the businesses in Central Oregon's aviation industry are busy doing what clusters do: buying, selling, innovating, competing and growing.

For example, the biggest local player in aviation, Lancair Company in Bend, which builds FAA certified aircraft, buys parts from its airport neighbor Precision Flight and is adding 40,000 square feet to its 140,000-square-foot facility at the Bend Airport. It plans to boost its work force to nearly 500 employees from the current 370 by the end of next year.

The aviation manufacturing industry has nearly 700 employees in Deschutes County and provides jobs in manufacturing and technology, according to Roger Lee, executive director of Economic Development for Central Oregon.

A common thread emerges from interviews with industry members and analysts: Aviation manufacturing in Central Oregon is enmeshed with the region's lifestyle qualities and a cluster key — tinkering.

"Tinkering is an important seed ... for a cluster," said Joe Cortright, principal economist for Impresa, a Portland consulting firm that studies regional economies.

See **Cluster** / C7



Mountain High Equipment & Supply Co., Redmond

This company makes aviation oxygen equipment and supplies. It contracts with Outback Manufacturing in Bend for computer-controlled machine work and its oxygen systems customers include buyers of planes from Lancair International Inc. of Redmond. It is now working with the FAA on getting approval for more products that will compete with some of those made by Precision Flight. The company's Oxygen Control Head, left, is part of one of its oxygen systems.



Precision Flight, Bend

Precision flight makes the Speed Brake, left, and other components for Lancair Company in Bend.



Wings of the Cascades, Redmond

Mary Schu, owner and chief pilot of Wings of the Cascades, instructs Travis Olson of Madras. Schu buys products from Precision Flight and Mountain High Equipment & Supply Co. and also trains customers of Lancair International Inc., Bend.



Lancair Company's Columbia 300 aircraft is made in Bend. The company expects to make one plane a day by October 2004 and turn a profit next year. The company currently takes three days to produce each plane.

Submitted photo