

Striking sales rise at aero firm

A round up of news from the region's manufacturing sector in the past week

Defence sector supplier Lightning Aerospace is on course for a record £3 million turnover after being the subject of a buy-out – and has signed up to a manufacturing collective as it seeks further sales growth.

The Coventry-based firm will break the £3 million barrier for the first time at the end of a milestone year which has seen it complete a buy-out by manufacturing entrepreneur Andrew Redfern.

Meanwhile, the firm has become the tenth to sign up to the Midlands Assembly Network (MAN), a group of sub-contract manufacturers, and is already setting its sights on inter-trading, sharing best practice and winning new business in the commercial, nuclear and marine sectors.

The company, which employs 32 people across its three sites in Coventry, supplies specialist fabrication and harnesses to the Ministry of Defence and is expecting to open up this demanding marketplace to other MAN companies.

Mr Redfern said: "We pride ourselves on our ability to do things differently so when the opportunity came to be part of MAN we jumped at the chance.

"Naturally, the new sales opportunities that will come from being part of the group was a major attraction, but we are also keen to tap into the knowledge of the nine other businesses when dealing with everyday issues."

He continued: "The fact we can split exhibition costs is a big benefit and we are looking forward to really exploring the strength of the brand in all of our marketing material.

"Our contacts with the MoD may also help other members of the group to secure work in this area for the first time."

Originally established as part of an Advantage West Midlands-backed automotive initiative, MAN has evolved into a self-sustainable group that boasts a combined turnover of £70 million and employs in excess of 600 people.

The five original members – Alucast, Barkley Plastics, Brandauer, FW Cables and Westley Engineering – have been joined by Advanced Chemical Etching, PP Electrical Systems, SMT Developments, Wrekin Circuits and Lightning Aerospace, giving it a complete manufacturing solution for customers in every sector imaginable.

By pooling expertise and capabilities, the coalition has secured in excess of £10 million of contracts, including new orders in automotive, aerospace and renewables.

Gerry Dunne, Chairman of MAN, added his support: "We are delighted to welcome Lightning Aerospace to the fold and to have the group back up to ten members.

"It's expertise in fabrication and specialist harnesses ensures we can offer the customer a complete 'manufacturing solution', including all mechanical, electrical and electronic engineering processes."

Pie-maker completes takeover

Redditch firm Proper Pies has taken over Barton & White, which makes chilled and frozen desserts and savouries.



Chris Beard, Andy Redfern and Charles Stewart from Lightning Aerospace, which has become the 10th member of manufacturing collective MAN

The undisclosed deal adds the Barton & White name to the group of companies owned by long established food entrepreneurs Martyn Thomas and Kevin Morel that includes Oliver James Foods, the UK's leading sous vide specialist.

Kevin Morel from Proper Pies said: "As a business enterprise, Barton and White has great parallels with our own operation and that's what appealed to us. The pride in what they do and the attention to detail is something that we can identify with.

"This acquisition will allow us to extend our product portfolio with premium patisserie lines which add value whilst providing an opportunity for us to access and develop new markets. It also provides us with the opportunity to bring new products to our existing customers."

Rewarding time for MTC

A £40 million flagship research facility for high-value manufacturing which is bringing together major industry players such as Airbus, Aero Engine Controls and Rolls Royce has been short-listed for a Lord Stafford innovation award.

The development of the Manufacturing Technology Centre (MTC) at Ansty Park was funded by Advantage West Midlands and the East Midlands Development Agency and covers the aerospace, automotive, ICT, energy and marine sectors.

The MTC was established to accelerate innovative product and process development in a wide range of innovative manufacturing capabilities.

The MTC has been shortlisted in the open collaboration category of the Lord Stafford Awards for innovation.

The awards recognise, showcase and celebrate the best in collaboration between business and academia.

Clive Hickman, chief executive of the

MTC explained that over the next ten years the facility would improve its capability continuously to meet the manufacturing demands of UK industry.

He said: "The MTC is a facility that really has been designed for industry, by industry.

The research partners, industrial members and the regional development agencies have come together to establish a facility which will have a major impact on the productivity of the manufacturing sector in the Midlands."

Barrier firm wins Edgbaston deal

A West Midlands manufacturer is providing a solid defence at the home of Warwickshire County Cricket Club.

Safetyflex Barriers, part of the GME Springs group based in Boston Place, Coventry has produced around 200 bespoke bollards to protect the entrance to the new £32 million Pavilion End at Edgbaston.

Director Marcus Gerrard said the firm has made around 10,000 high security spring bollards over the last year for high-profile developments including airports and government buildings and said this was the first sporting project the company has worked on.

He said: "We were really pleased to be approached by Warwickshire CCC project director Phil Macdonald to provide our expertise and play a part in the expansion of one of the world's leading cricket grounds."

Engineer is lauded

Midland engineer Shaun Addy from engine maker Cubewano has been lauded by his peers, scooping the title of Design Engineer of the Year at the British Engineering Excellence Awards (BEEA).

The judges praised Mr Addy, now R&D manager for Cubewano, for his unfaltering commitment, commenting that "whilst it can be a 9 to 5 occupation for some, those who create the best designs don't recognise the constraints of the clock".

The panel noted that in his 26 years in the profession working for the likes of Lotus and BMW he had gained numerous patents for his innovative design work on some of the world's most respected internal combustion engines.

Eric Wilkinson, chairman of the judges for BEEA, said: "With a proven track record in the automotive market Mr Addy is stepping out to be innovative in a small company, where he is taking risks, but using his experience. He thinks nothing of 5am starts six days a week to solve an engineering challenge - that legendary 'one step further' ethos."

Robotics firm devises innovative cell

Robotics firm Kuka Systems has worked with Bombardier Aerospace to devise an innovative robotic cell for laying up dry carbon fibre material as a result of a national research and development project.

The Halesowen-based firm took part in the one-year i-Composites programme run by the Technology Strategy Board. Kuka, together with other project partners Loop Technology and Güdel, formed part of a wider consortium looking at ways of developing affordable composites manufacturing technologies.

The robotic cell developed during the project focused on its potential use in future wing production and is currently being trialled at Bombardier in Belfast. It aims to process dry carbon fibre material more quickly and efficiently than the existing method.

Gavin Campbell, director at Bombar-

dier Aerospace in Belfast, said: "The cell was completed within the year and we are extremely pleased with its performance during this early development phase. With further development and trialling, we believe there is an opportunity for future application on aircraft wing programmes. The technology may also be attractive to others working in the field of composites."

Apprentice scheme launched

Birmingham-based electronics integrator and logistics solutions provider, CHH Conex has introduced a new apprenticeship programme as it looks to increase the number of skilled workers within the technology and manufacturing industries under its people development plan.

The new programme, which has been launched in association with the Engineering Employers Federation (EEF West Midlands), forms part of the company's overall strategy of becoming an employer of choice within the West Midlands and follows the UK Government's latest commitment to increasing the number of apprenticeships.

Tim Hughes, managing director, said: "At CHH Conex our people plan outlines our commitment to investing in the ongoing development and skills of our people for the benefit of our business, our customers and local communities.

"CHH Conex's apprenticeship programme gives us a wonderful opportunity to identify and invest in new, local talent and enables us to help develop the next generation of skilled workers who will play a key role in sustainable economic growth for both the manufacturing and wider technology industries here in the UK."