

Quality of workers helped keep manufacturing plant in Windsor

By Harlan Levy

Journal Inquirer | Posted: Monday, March 13, 2017 11:32 am

WINDSOR — Michael Kraemer, general manager of precision-parts manufacturer Leipold Inc., says he argued with his boss to keep a plant in town because of the workers available.

Speaking at a business breakfast last week, Kraemer heaped praise on the hands-on science, technology, engineering, and math — or STEM — education at Windsor’s middle and high schools.

About two years ago when Leipold’s boss in Germany was going to move the Connecticut plant to South Carolina for tax incentives, Kraemer convinced them to stay — in part because of STEM education in schools like Windsor’s.

“I told my CEO that I have been down South to train employees for sophisticated manufacturing jobs, and I can’t get people down there with the same skill set as in Connecticut,” he said. “I see huge problems. We can’t afford to put someone in a multiyear training program.”

In Connecticut, he said, there’s a good range of skilled workers, and the education system is better than in the South.

“We have the ability to draw from high schools that teach what it means to manufacture something,” he said, “where the math is being taught, where the problem-solving thinking is being taught, where the collaboration and teamwork is being taught, and that’s extremely important to us, because doing the job is a team effort.”

Standing before a table full of students’ precision products, Kraemer said it’s gratifying that STEM students learn to use the cutting-edge methods of industry on the road to getting high-skilled jobs at companies like Leipold.

“When I see programs like this, I’m really excited,” Kraemer said. “This is exactly the type of



Precisely what he wants

Michael Kraemer, general manager of Leipold Inc., stands behind Windsor students’ projects at a recent breakfast hosted by the Windsor Chamber of Commerce.

education we need.”

Leipold, a German family-owned company that has been in Windsor since 1998, serves the automotive, electrical, telecommunications, medical device, and building systems industries.

Thanks in part to Kraemer’s arguments, Leipold decided against the South Carolina move and recently completed construction of a 20,000-square-foot addition to its 15,000-square-foot facility, almost doubling the Marshal Phelps Road plant.

Leipold had 40 employees in 2015 and now has 50 at its CNC computer-control shop.

“And we’re hiring,” Kraemer told the crowd at the Large Employers Breakfast hosted by the Windsor Chamber of Commerce, adding that his goal is to employ up to 60 workers in the next two years, including machine operators and administrative and other personnel. Pay for new machinists will start at \$17 an hour and can rise to \$25 per hour.

The company also received financial assistance from the town and state.

In May the town approved a three-year, 30 percent tax abatement on Leipold’s addition.

In 2015 Leipold received a \$3 million low-interest loan from the state Department of Economic and Community Development through the Manufacturers Assistance Act to assist with the \$8 million expansion cost and purchase of machinery and equipment.

The loan will carry 1 percent interest for 10 years, with principal deferred for the first six years.

The state may forgive \$1 million of the \$3 million loan because Leipold added the 10 jobs. In addition, each new position may be eligible for an additional \$100,000 forgiveness up to a total of \$2 million if 20 jobs are added over the initial 40 jobs.