

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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Baystate is Open for Business

As you probably know by now, I see business development as a critical factor in restoring the Massachusetts economy. The state has lost tens of thousands of jobs over the past few years, and we must reverse that trend. I have recently visited several thriving businesses in the region and have come away from those visits convinced that the turnaround is happening, that once again Massachusetts is open for business! This is what I have seen.

First I toured a small building in the East Longmeadow Industrial Park, Burd Manufacturing Co. I had driven past the structure, located next door to the new post office, but had no idea of the scope of its operation. The facility takes steel bars as a raw material, feeds those bars into machines and produces a finished product that in turn becomes a raw material for manufacturers of consumer goods. It is a simple operation, but the output of a single part can be 3 million a year. Burd is the sole supplier of motor shafts for Hamilton Beach blenders and many Black and Decker kitchen appliances.

Don Burd, owner of the company, says that quality and cost are the two factors that make his business a success. He will use the state's new 3 percent investment tax credit to offset the cost of the new machinery, and he continues to beat the competition, even though he must ship to customers in the southern states.

Another local success story is the Danaher Co., formerly Easco. When I accompanied Gov. Weld on a tour of the plant last month, I saw raw metal converted to a red hot tool, eventually finished as a polished ratchet ready for the shelf at Sears. This factory produces Craftsman ratchets for Sears and several other brands. It employs 300 workers, and will now add another 30 employees as it introduces a new product line. The governor was touring the plant because of last month's announcement that the Springfield plant has won out over North Carolina and Arkansas as the new production site for its parent company. The new investment tax credit and training grants from our new jobs law, combined with other cost cutting measures to allow these important manufacturing jobs to remain in Massachusetts.

As a change from heavy manufacturing, I toured State Line Potato Chips in Wilbraham, and I found that company is planning to use the new tax credit as well. Jack Salmon, owner, is planning to add capacity for corn chip production to take advantage of the growing popularity of tortilla chips as a snack food.

Over all, the new Economic Development law is working for Massachusetts. The Legislature and the administration continue to address unemployment insurance and workers compensation, areas of special concern. We will continue working to meet the competition from other states. We want to restore the slogan, Make it in Massachusetts.

Note: After last week's redistricting debate in Boston, Monson and Wales will become part of our Second Hampden District. Another area business owner, Frank Armata, has arranged to introduce me to the people of those towns. In addition to his Longmeadow store, Frank operates Armata's in Monson, and I appreciate his warm welcome to the neighborhood.