

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

July 5, 2001

Making it in Massachusetts

From time to time I have the opportunity to visit a worksite in the Second Hampden District. When a company offers an open house or receives special recognition for an accomplishment, legislators are often invited inside the factory walls. Such an invitation came last week with a call from the state's Division of Employment and Training. This week's By-line will talk about the work that goes on behind the scenes of a growing Massachusetts company, Springfield Spring Corporation.

The company, owned by Norman Rodriguez and Tina Malley, is the recipient of a Workforce Training Fund grant, money from a fund financed by the state's employers to help keep employees' skills up to date. Grants are distributed through a competitive application process, and I was there recently to see a check for \$40,160 given to our local business. This is what I learned from the day's event.

Springfield Spring is a company whose purpose, if not its place of business, is contained in its name. The company originated in Springfield, but today it is located in East Longmeadow, where it produces springs, more springs than you can imagine. A newcomer to mechanics, I learned the importance of springs in today's mechanized world. Any time you push a button that pops back out, you experience the action of a spring.

Inside the Shaker Road facility machines were whirring, pulling in wire from a huge spool and spitting out coiled springs. A light sensor rejected irregularities, and after trays filled with "good" springs, each tray was heat-treated to set its springs into shape permanently. Before the heating process, a wire coil simply collapses when it is compressed. The springs in production last week included inch-long coils that are destined for window screens. These tiny springs will hold screens in place until the arrival of winter, when a homeowner pulls a knob to release the spring and remove the screen.

The company's products range from tiny springs to such industrial components as fork lifts. Springfield Spring is the exclusive supplier of forklifts for Home Depot. Company sales last year reached \$4 million for the first time and the new training grant, promises to extend the growth curve. The company will use the grant to develop procedures required for the ISO 9000 quality designation, which will open new markets for the company.

Training money will also facilitate marketing operations by implementing an internet-based information system. The internet can be a gateway to new markets, but its successful utilization will require significant initial investment. Both training operations are focused on producing a more efficient, competitive manufacturing operation.

Employers pay for the training program through their contributions to the unemployment trust fund, an assessment they agreed to in the late nineties in order to secure legislative approval of a reduction in unemployment insurance charges. It is rewarding to see a local company receive benefits from that state fund. Springfield Spring anticipates ten percent growth in sales over the next two years and a commensurate growth in employees. The owners, employees and the region are all winners with the success of one \$40,000 grant. I hope other local companies will be next year's success stories.