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Grimsby firm takes off with Lockheed deal

By Steve Arnold
The Hamilton Spectator
GRIMSBY (Sep 26, 2006)

Stealth aircraft slide through an enemy's radar to rain death and destruction without warning.

For the last three years a local company has been sliding through the region's economic radar, bringing Grimsby profit and high-tech jobs by helping to build the next generation of stealth warplane.

Handling Specialty, which started more than 40 years ago building floor cranes in founder George Machan's two car garage, is one of a growing number of small businesses earning millions of dollars in revenues by grabbing a piece of one of the largest military aircraft contracts ever awarded.

The design and production of the F-35 Lightning II, the warplane intended to replace aging fleets of F-16s and F-22s in Canada, the United States and other countries, is a \$250 billion US project that's bringing new opportunity to a struggling aerospace industry. Also known as the Joint Strike Fighter, the aircraft is being jointly developed by a consortium including Canada, the U.S., Britain, Australia and



SPECIAL TO THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

Handling Specialty has been hired to make the vertical platforms needed for the movement of workers and materials constructing the new F-35 Lightning II.



Barry Gray, the Hamilton Spectator

Thomas Beach, left, of Handling Specialty, and company president Dennis Parass, far right, chat with Tom Burbage, vice-president for the Joint Strike Fighter at Lockheed. Handling Specialty is the best, 'bar none' says Burbage.



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THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

other countries. Lockheed Martin Aeronautics Co., of Fort Worth, Texas, is building it.

Handling Specialty's share of that bounty is a series of contracts to supply vertical platforms that allow workers and parts to be moved around the massive wings of the aircraft as they're being assembled in Texas.

So far 14 such platforms have been installed and as many as 50 could be required as production of the aircraft ramps up.

Tom Burbage, Lockheed's executive vice-president in charge of the F-35 program, said Handling Specialty was chosen because "bar none, this company is as good as it gets. That a small niche company like this can work on such a massive project is a real success story."

Dennis Parass, Handling Specialty's owner and president, said Lockheed is different from other major defence contractors because it actively encourages small companies to bid for projects, and once they show they can deliver, it helps them find other work within its global operations.

Government support, such as the \$150 million Canada has committed to the Joint Strike Fighter project, has also been important.

"We're really thankful our government has made this commitment," he said. "The world is changing and we have to change with it. That means being more flexible."

As of August the company had received five contracts under the program worth more than \$10 million. It is one of 50 Canadian companies under contract to the project. Before the aircraft program, Handling Specialty got public attention for designing and building the special submersible stage used by the world-famous Cirque de Soleil's 'O' production at the Bellagio resort and casino in Las Vegas. The four-piece stage is raised and lowered through more than 4 million litres of water.

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Need to know:

Where: Handling Specialty has plants in Grimsby and Niagara Falls, N.Y.

Workforce: 62 employees

Annual sales: Ranges between \$18 million and \$20 million.



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