DSU, First State Manufacturing and Milford sign collaborative accord

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Delaware State University joined with First State Manufacturing (FSM) and the City of Milford, Del., to announce a new public-private partnership that is expected to stimulate economic development efforts in Kent and Sussex counties.

With U.S. Sen. Tom Carper, DSU President Harry L. Williams and Milford Mayor Ronnie Rogers taking part in the media event held May 4 at the FSM facility in Milford, the Small Business Administration announced the launching of the "First State Moves the Nation" Small Business Accelerator.

DSU's Dr. Michael Casson said the collaboration will leverage the resources of the partners.

Sen. Carper noted the growth of DSU over the years. "Look at it now, with record enrollment and retention, and now DSU is on its way to be an economic engine in Delaware," he said.

As partners in the Small Business Accelerator initiative:

- DSU's Center for Economic Development and International Trade (DSU CEDIT) will provide intellectual resources such as economic development forecast data, empirical analyses based on models of the state's economy, as well as incubator-type services such as marketing research, accounting, project management and IT services.
- First State Manufacturing will provide 10,000 square feet of physical space at its Milford facility, which will service as an on-site business accelerator. The leadership of FSM will also work with DSU CEDIT to provide a standard and vision for its economic development model, and also serve as part of a Solutions Group that will contribute information on business solutions and best practices in the area of manufacturing.
- The City of Milford will commit to leveraging its economic development resources to provide opportunity and training, oversee the continuation of its Strategic Plan goals and initiatives that will support business development in the city, and actively promote partnerships among business, government and nonprofit sectors in support of job growth in the city.

The DSU president noted that this is the type of initiative to which DSU desires to apply its expertise.

"After I became president, we looked at how DSU can be a player in this state; and in the vision statement we developed in my first year, it was noted that DSU's goal is to invigorate the economy of Delaware and the Mid-Atlantic Region," Dr. Williams said.

"This partnership actualizes that vision."

FSM – owned by Eli Valenzuela (president), his wife Sher Valenzuela (vice president), and Ashley Wolfe (executive director) – is an industrial upholstery manufacturing and solutions business in Milford that brings to the business accelerator initiative its experience starting as a small business operated out of a one-car garage in 1998 and developing into a highly successful award-winning company that carries out its work in a 70,000 square-foot facility and employs 70 people.

(L-r) FSM's Ashley Wolfe, Eli and Sher Valenzuela; Milford Mayor Ronnie Rogers; Dr. Michael Casson, DSU CEDIT co-director; DSU President Harry L. Williams; Tony Leta, Del. director of the Small Business Administration; Dr. Shelton Rhodes, dean of the DSU College of Business; U.S. Sen. Tom Carper; Dr. Nanda Viswanathan, co-director of DSU CEDIT; and DSU Provost Alton Thompson.

"Our story is a Delaware story, and we believe it be the story of others as well," Mrs. Valenzuela said.

She said the business accelerator can bring about an economic ecosystem that will result in "intelligent consumers" of resources. "This business accelerator is going to support the four sectors of business – manufacturing, agriculture, tourism and health care," Mrs. Valenzuela said.

Dr. Michael Casson, who along with Dr. Nanda Viswanathan serves as DSU CEDIT co-directors, noted that the state of the economy and the needed commitment to Delaware's citizens are addressed by this initiative.

"The accelerator will be home to the expertise and resources of DSU, the City of Milford and FSM, all working collaboratively to support entrepreneurship and job growth," Dr. Casson said.

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