



Business

Calif. firm eyes R.I. for new plant

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By Paul Edward Parker

Journal Staff Writer

A California aerospace company is scouting locations in Rhode Island in order to open a facility to build armored boats by the end of the year.

Kelly Space & Technology is looking for a 20,000- to 30,000-square-foot building to accommodate manufacturing operations and engineering offices, according to chief executive officer Michael J. Gallo. The company has opened an office in Warwick near T.F. Green Airport and has one employee evaluating potential sites, Gallo said.

KST, as the San Bernardino company is known, specializes in finding commercial applications for defense and aerospace products. "We're kind of bringing space technology down to earth," Gallo said. The privately held company produces a proprietary, lightweight ballistic material that can be molded into almost any shape.

KST chose Rhode Island for the new facility in part because of luck. The company had been involved in an armored-vehicle project in Oregon, where one of its key employees was a retired Navy special forces member from Rhode Island. As the vehicle project wound down and Gallo was looking for a location to build armored boats, he talked to the man about the Ocean State.

But luck wasn't the whole story. Gallo, a native of Fitchburg, Mass., also was drawn by Rhode Island's expertise in the boat-building industry and the defense contractors in the state and nearby.

The company also was attracted by assistance from the state's Business Innovation Factory, a nonprofit company that includes government officials and that seeks to support experimentation and innovation.

Gallo said his company is looking to build 15-foot boats with lightweight composite-material armor built in. The small craft would have military and law-enforcement applications, such as delivering small special-forces units to a beach. The boats would be jet-powered and could operate in 14 inches of water. He said the company may enter the boat-building business itself or may work with vendors who already have the experience and simply incorporate the armor into the process.

The \$20-million-a-year company currently has 54 full-time employees and contracts out for another 25 or so, Gallo said. It celebrated its 15th anniversary on Sunday.

pparker@projo.com