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SBA CIBRE Conversations help new aerospace company take flight

When Jim Davis began attending the School of Business Administration's informal CIBRE Conversations, he had no idea where networking with other professionals could take him. He certainly didn't imagine it would lead to creation of an aircraft company from the ground up.

But it's exactly what SBA Dean Mohan Tanniru envisioned -- bringing professionals together to network and move the Michigan economy forward.

Tanniru knows Michigan possesses something just as valuable as its natural resources -- a plethora of talented, experienced and knowledgeable professionals who, because of today's economy, are unemployed or seeking new opportunities.

With 30 years experience in computer systems, product development applications and processes, Davis fit this profile perfectly after he lost his job as a program manager on the Ford account at Dassault Systemes in 2009.

After learning about CIBRE Conversations, Davis made the hour-long trip from Brighton to check it out. "I had no idea what I was getting into, but I thought 'why not?'," he said.

This step sparked the knowledge sharing and networking that led to the creation of WAVE Aircraft Company, which plans to produce a new category of high-performance aircraft that could serve as air taxis, charters or corporate planes.

Through discussions about the aerospace industry, Tanniru connected Davis to CIBRE member Maria McKendrick of ArtCraft Pattern Works, who was researching bringing light jet business to Michigan. McKendrick, in turn, introduced Davis to Perry DiClemente.

"Perry and I had a long discussion about aircraft and design," Davis said. "We had a common view of things and the net of it was that Perry had designed several aircraft. We decided to combine his design experience and vision with my background in marketing, strategy and sales to launch a new company."

When up and running, WAVE has the potential to affect the employment of more than 1,500 people, including automotive employees who have skills that can easily transfer to this emerging industry.

With the business plan complete, the company is searching for financing.

"Our intention is to build the plane here," said Davis. "We know there's all kind of talent, tooling, manufacturing, testing, and analysis right here. We can create the entire aircraft in southeastern Michigan."

Once the funding is secured, Davis expects it will take another four to five years for design, certification, prototype build, flight test, and production -- a lead time similar to the medical device and pharmaceutical industries.

"One of the things CIBRE Conversations started was this cascading series of consequences, that has worked out to start an airplane company in southeast Michigan," says Davis.

Retooling and rebuilding Michigan by tapping the state's vast talent pool -- exactly what CIBRE Conversations is all about.

SUMMARY

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