

SPECIALTY MATERIALS INC.

JULIA MALAKIE / LOWELL SUN

Specialty Materials, Inc. in Lowell, which produces boron, silicon carbide and other advanced fibers and materials, receives an award Thursday from the Small Business Administration. From left, Emily Byrne, district director for U.S. Rep. Lori Trahan, Robert Nelson of the SBA, co-owner and CEO Monica Rommel of Harvard, and Wendell Davis of the SBA.



LOWELL FIRM FLIES HIGH

Small Business Association names it National Subcontractor of the Year

By Jon Winkler

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LOWELL » The F-15 Eagle fighter jet, Predator drone and Seahawk helicopter all reach

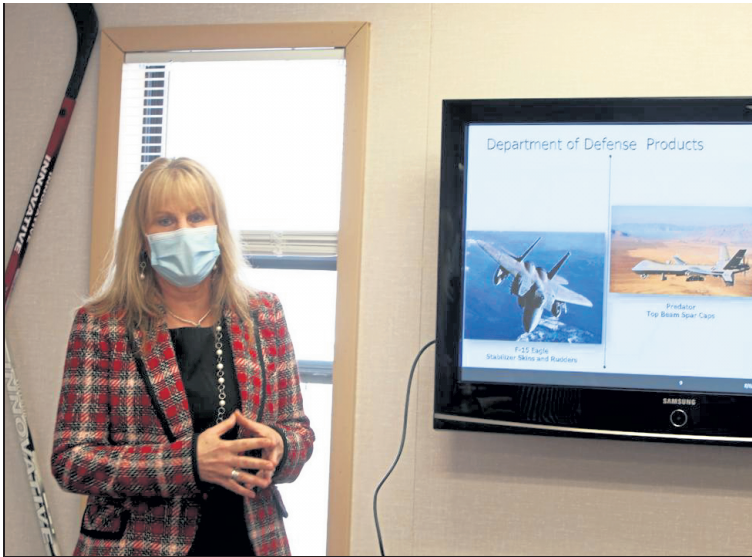
heights higher than anyone else can see. But if anyone gets the chance to see one of those fierce aircrafts up close, one might notice the little details on these machines, like the sta-

bilizer skins on the F-15 or the rotor blades for the Seahawk.

As high as those pieces get in the sky, one might not know how they started deep in Lowell.

That material comes from Specialty Materials Inc., which was named the Region One Subcontractor and National Subcontractor of the Year by

AWARD » 8A



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Specialty Materials CEO Monica Rommel talks about the company's products.



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Specialty Materials test technician Larry Devost of Merrimack, N.H., works in the filament testing room.

Award

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the U.S. Small Business Administration. On Thursday, the company located on Middlesex Street, was presented the Region One award by the SBA's New England Regional Administrator Wendell Davis and its Massachusetts District Director Robert Nelson. The award presentation is meant to be part of Small

Business Week which, according to Nelson, will take place Sept. 22 to 24 after being delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"It's just wonderful to have a Massachusetts manufacturer as not only the Region One Subcontractor of the Year, but to get national recognition," Nelson added. "You look at the product and where it's going into other products that are helping to secure the United States. These are end products that are

protecting all of us, so it's just amazing that this is here in Lowell. It's something you wouldn't ordinarily think of, to have a business like this in our backyard doing amazing things."

Those things include developing boron fiber and silicon carbide, a business that CEO Monica Rommel found much like what many textile plants did in Lowell during the Industrial Revolution. While Specialty Materials makes

its big bucks through contracts with the Department of Defense, its boron fiber is used in more common items like fishing rods, bicycles and even hockey sticks. Still, the corporation's customers include Boeing, Northrop Grumman Innovation Systems and Rolls Royce High Temperature Composites.

"We're learning a lot about the outreach," Rommel said. "It looks simple, but the team really stepped up the challenge."

Rick Rommel, Monica's husband and Chief Business Officer, said the coronavirus pandemic has impacted

Specialty Materials, though only in certain aspects and not overall work.

"I think the main line of our business largely focused in the military and aerospace industries less so," he added. "But our business that touched sporting goods and commercial segments, they've been impacted a signifi-

cant amount. But that's a smaller percentage of specialties business, so it's had less of a direct impact on business here."

Still, Specialty Materials expresses gratitude and honor for receiving the awards. The Rommels also appreciated the rest of the corporation's staff for their hard work and are hoping to develop more boron products that make the company "vertically integrated" with other U.S.-made products.