

## Talking Shop

By Jay Young

U.S. Rep. Tom Reed visited a pair of Jamestown-area businesses on Monday afternoon to hear feedback on the continuing COVID-19 economic recovery.



Nick Bruce of Rand Precision Machining shows Representative Tom Reed a machined part. P-J photo by Jay Young

Reed initially planned to be in Washington this week, but changed his plans and returned to the 23rd district to visit Honest John's Pizzeria on Fairmount Avenue and Rand Precision Machining in Falconer.

"We wanted to see how business is going," Reed, R-Corning, said to a group of employees at Rand. "How you survived COVID, where you see yourself post-COVID, and just touch gloves with you. We are home for the week and just wanted to get your thoughts and just tell you we are here 24/7."

Meeting with Rand employees for a tour of the Falconer facility, which includes advanced robotics production, Reed sought feedback from president and CEO Kurt Grimm on the company's performance during the pandemic and the effectiveness of economic relief such as the Paycheck Protection Program.

Grimm, who purchased Rand nearly four years ago along with business partners, reported that manufacturing demand has remained strong.

"We've actually run the company from about 54 employees when we took over to about 120 employees at this point," Grimm said. "Our sales went up pretty significantly from 2019 to last year. Probably about a 40% increase, and we are off and running in 2021."

Grimm said Rand was able to receive PPP funds during the first round of congressional stimulus, which they were able to use following a COVID-19 outbreak in December that forced employees to stay home.

"We did have a breakout just before Christmas," Grimm said. "The PPP money was beneficial because I knew in the back of my mind, it is a big expense (to close down briefly), but we did have the support to do it. That is why we were glad ultimately that we did have that."

Grimm said much of the Rand's recent growth stems from manufacturing for the defense industry.

Reed also raised the topic of \$600 enhanced unemployment distributed during the pandemic, mentioning the potential for those payments to disincentivize some workers.

Grimm stated that due to the specialized machining and advanced manufacturing done at Rand, that portion of the stimulus has not had a significant impact on the company's employees.

However, there was discussion that the enhanced unemployment may have impacted recruitment of new workers.

"Because you went from 54 to 120 (employees), that is not the norm of what I've heard during COVID because of that disincentive financially," Reed said. "Obviously your skill set is pretty specialized."



U.S. Rep. Tom Reed speaks with Rand Precision Machining president and CEO Kurt Grimm on Monday afternoon. P-J photo by Jay Young