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FEATURED

Congressman visits essential fabric manufacturer

By MATT FARRAND The Standard-Journal

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Front from left, Arielle Schock, OTEX textile development specialist, Rep. Fred Keller (R-Pa.12) and Chuck Moore, OTEX director of operations, discussed tensile strength of a specialty fabric during a tour.

BY MATT FARRAND/The Standard-Journal

WATSONTOWN — A little-known but essential local business was visited Monday afternoon by a member of Congress.

OTEX Specialty Narrow Fabrics hosted Congressman Fred Keller (R-Pa.12) for a tour of operations and a discussion along the way.

Lisa McManus, OTEX operations administrator, said the Watsontown plant was the sole manufacturing site of the family owned business. Fabrics they've made were components of aerospace, industrial safety, military equipment and life-saving gear.



Use of OTEX fabrics, currently none wider than 4 inches across, was deemed essential in 2020. OTEX stayed open and produced elastic for personal protection equipment (PPE), flame retardant fabrics, head harness straps used in helmets and others from the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

McManus said the company does amazing things with a relatively small staff. Since looms need to keep going even if a person is out, employees are cross-trained to fill in at work stations as needed.

A life-long Watsontown resident, McManus described the company as a "hidden gem" which she learned more about when they advertised for the position.



Keller, a visitor to a number of local industries in recent days, said it was an activity the district team enjoyed doing.

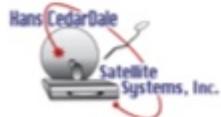
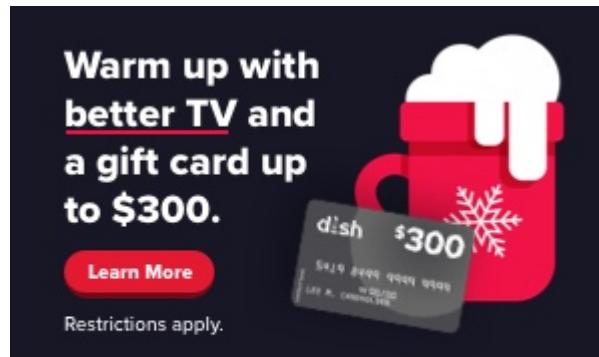
"By being active in the community we can understand what our businesses are running into, the people that work here, and what we need to be working on," Keller said. "This is just a great example of how in (the 12th District) we have people dedicated to making products that help our first responders and our military."

Chuck Moore, OTEX director of operations, explained troublesome supply chain challenges to Keller. OTEX can be in a bind if a yarn supplier based in North Carolina cannot get qualified employees which could delay completion of its orders. Keller concurred that the extended lead time pointed to the need to reopen the economy.

Arielle Schock, OTEX textile development specialist, said one of their featured fabrics has a tensile strength of 33,000 pounds per square inch. The webbing was supplied to other companies which have made reinforcements for underwater tunnels such as New York City subway tunnels and the Holland Tunnel between Manhattan and New Jersey.

Schock demonstrated the tensile strength of a fabric sample using a test mechanism custom-built for OTEX.

Russell Lawrence, a representative of the Innovative Manufacturers Center (IMC), was also on the tour. He said the IMC, a state and federal organization which works with manufacturers, was based at the Pennsylvania College of Technology. Objectives included overcoming obstacles to collaboration.



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