

For Immediate Release

Friday, February 20, 2004
Business Section D



Tomorrow's Technology Today

Navy Pact Buoys Stuart Firm



PalmBeachPost.com

By Susan T. Port_Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

STUART - Ideas are John Justak's stock in trade. And one of the engineer's ideas has landed his tiny Stuart-based company a very big military contract.

Late last month, Justak's Advanced Technologies Group Inc. was awarded a contract worth up to \$25 million to design and build a turbine seal that would improve the fuel efficiency of military aircraft engines, U.S. Department of Defense officials said.

Justak, 42, has been working on the seal with the U.S. Navy since 2000. In April, he will start testing the seal at Rolls-Royce Plc's plant in Indianapolis. Opening a plant to manufacture the seal locally would provide his company with a steady stream of revenue, he said. More than 90 percent of Advanced Technologies' sales come from contracts with government agencies. 'It's all about coming up with an idea and seeing it through,' he said. 'Last year, all I wanted to do was license it. After meeting with potential investors and venture capitalists, I realize there is a huge opportunity.' 'Now I am thinking about assembling it here.'

Justak described the Navy contract as a 'big deal' for his firm, which employs five. The privately held company posted revenue of \$500,000 last year, and revenue is expected to hit \$800,000 this year. 'We're on the verge of the next stage,' he said. 'Hopefully, this latest Navy contract will take us there.'

Justak, who grew up in Valparaiso, IN., earned a bachelor's degree in ocean engineering from Florida International University in 1983. After working engineering jobs in Florida and New Hampshire, he signed on with Pratt & Whitney in 1989 and worked in the company's research & development division until 1997. He founded Advanced Technologies that year in a bid to stay involved in R&D, something he thought Pratt was moving away from.

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Justak benefited from the congressional Small Business Innovation Research Program, which funds thousands of small businesses for high-tech research and development projects that solve government problems and also have potential for commercialization, said Jeff Bond, the program's administrator at the Defense Department._

Any government department with a budget of more than \$100 million for research and development must participate, Bond said.

Advanced Technologies attained two patents through the program, he said.

Finding solutions is an ideal life's work for Justak, who always keeps pen and paper on hand in case an idea should strike.

'I develop things you can't buy off the shelf,' he said. 'It's not always technical ideas. Something could always be better.'

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