

Open day showcases aero parts research

An open day showcasing the largest-ever research project backed by Innovate UK to develop cost-effective titanium alloy structural airframe parts takes place in the Black Country.

KUKA will host the event on June 29 at its Halesowen facility to highlight the results of the three-year TiFab programme which predicts annual raw material savings of around £9 million.

The open day programme includes a series of presentations by TiFab Consortium members and a linear friction welding process demonstration featuring the Thompson LR50 machine.

Consortium members KUKA, CAV Advanced Technologies, Ten Solutions and The Welding Institute have been exploring the use of the linear friction welding method to bond lightweight titanium alloy parts.

With support from several OEMs, they have studied more than 170 aircraft components as part of the £2.6m project.

"We're keen to share the exciting results of the TiFab project and show how we've accomplished a 100 per cent success rate in producing tailored blank solutions and at least 30 per cent in material savings," said Sanjiv Mann, of KUKA.

New chamber vice-president

The Black Country Chamber of Commerce has appointed Julie Cunningham, wholesale finance director at Willenhall's AF Blakemore, as its new vice-president.

She is a chartered management accountant who has a wealth of commercial experience across a number of organisations, including AF Blakemore, Midland Recruitment Solutions and Poundland.

She has also spent six years as a self-employed financial consultant and headed up many high-level projects on behalf of the Co-op, Holland & Barrett, M&S, Homeserve and the RAC.

At AF Blakemore she sits on six divisional boards.

Record growth after Erodex investment

Report by John Corser
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Erodex UK, the UK's leading supplier of electrical discharge machinery graphite and tooling to the aerospace market, has experienced record levels of growth following a £3.5million investment and expansion into North America.

Turnover has increased by 20 per cent during the Halesowen company's last financial year, following previous record years for the firm.

The growth is as a direct result of the investment, specifically targeted at work within the aerospace and industrial turbine sectors.

Director Steve Rolinson said: "We have experienced significant growth on the tooling side of the business, which in fact is the fastest growing part of the Erodex group. The decision to invest in our own tool rooms and dedicated tooling inspection facilities has given us a real

point of differentiation in the market. As well as designing the optimum electrode, the electrode holder and work piece holder, Erodex design and manufacture the whole package, all with a single point of contact. This is unique in our market and we are seeing more and more customers buying into this mindset because of cost and time savings."

As well as picking up a number of new clients in China and Israel, the company on Tipper Industrial Estate, Cradley, has benefitted from the decision to establish a new £2 million facility in Virginia in the United States as well as investing £1.5m in a new UK tool room and machine shop.

The decision to create a new UK tool room enabled Erodex to produce its own tooling in house - particularly that with a significant amount of intellectual property.

It has allowed for tighter quality control, greater support and the carrying out of function trials by its own toolmakers prior to release.

To facilitate the growth, Erodex expanded its workforce by 10 per cent to above 100, taking on three experienced aerospace tool makers, a tooling manager, two project managers, designers and more CNC operators.

A group quality manager and group quality engineer were also recruited as part of a move towards AS9100 Rev D, ISO14001 and NADCAP Certifications.

"The move will allow further diversification of Erodex into flying parts. We currently make the electrodes required to make flying parts," added Mr Rolinson.

Hague sales boost is a real 'home warming'

Report by Simon Penfold
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ONE of the UK's leading manufacturers of non-standard fasteners has celebrated moving into its new home in Willenhall by securing a string of new contracts.

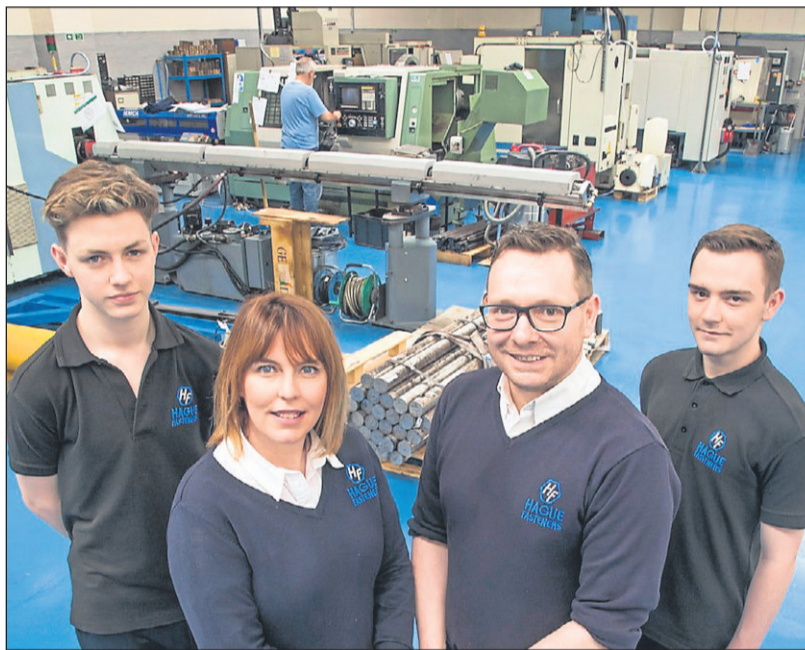
Family-owned Hague Fasteners, which has recently been awarded ISO9001:2015, is on course for a record year after winning £300,000 of work to supply specialist products to the oil and gas, petrochemical and growing construction sectors.

The 25 per cent surge in orders comes at a perfect time for the Black Country business after it completed a move to a larger factory in the town a move that more than triples its production capacity to 8,500 sq ft.

Hague Fasteners, which has been manufacturing fasteners and bolt and nuts in the West Midlands for 46 years, transferred two miles from its former unit on Watery Lane Industrial Estate to the new site in Monmer Close.

The new premises have benefitted from significant investment on installing purpose built offices and conference rooms, new flooring in the workshop and creation of a dedicated inspection and despatch area.

"We had reached bursting point at our old site so knew 2017 was always going to be the year we made a move," explained



Tom, Claire, Jon and Jack Hague from Hague Fasteners, Willenhall

chiefexecutive Jon Hague, who runs the firm with his wife Claire.

"It took us over six months to find the right place, but as soon as we saw it we knew the location was ideal, giving us more space to take on new clients and the ability to plan the layout down to the finest detail."

He continued: "Our factory now boasts more CNC machines and is laid out in cells to help improve efficiency. This is just the start, we've got exciting plans to add further new technology to the shop-floor and expect to take on six new people between now and the end of the year - some of whom could be apprentices."

Hague Fasteners was formed in 1971 by the late John Hague - the father of the current MD - and has been manufacturing in the Black Country for more than four decades.

The company produces specialist fasteners, headed bolts, studs, nuts and milled components in a wide range of high integrity materials and critical nickel alloys.

It has built an enviable reputation for supplying products you can't get off the shelf in small to medium batch quantities, from single prototypes through to 5, 10, 25 and 50 part runs.

Claire continued: "We have a lot of repeat business as our customers like the level of service we provide and our ability to provide technical fasteners quickly, in sizes ranging from 3mm to 200mm in diameter.

"Our bolts, fasteners and pins get used in a wide range of applications."

Hague Fasteners is proving a family affair with the couple's two eldest sons now an important part of the business.

Jack Hague, aged 19, has been with the firm for two years, working in all parts of the company before settling into a technical/project planning role. He's joined by his younger brother Tom, 17, who is currently working in production scheduling and inspection.

"In a few months, we'll have our third son Max joining us so then it will be a truly family affair," said Jon.

The three-month rebuild project cost Hague Fasteners nearly seven figures and the new factory offers three times the space of the old site where it had reached capacity.



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