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## Local entrepreneurs find success in Adirondack Park

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By **KIM SMITH DEDAM**

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RAY BROOK — Adirondack Park Agency commissioners passed around a medical spine stabilizer, a ski boot and a bulletproof vest.

But they weren't looking to stock the office-supply closet.

They were learning about products made in the Adirondack Park.

Jeff Allott, owner and president of General Composites in Willsboro, brought the gear to a recent APA meeting for a high-tech show-and-tell.

He also brought fresh perspective to genuine American manufacturing ingenuity, telling how he chose to stay here while many larger companies moved operations overseas.

His success has goals anchored in quality of life.

"I could have gone anywhere, and I ended up back here. I still think we live in the most beautiful place in the country."

### **GREEN APPROACH**

Allott's desire to design composite products was inspired by wilderness adventure, he said, when he started out to build better ski gear and a tough canoe paddle.

After formative years with a partner in Troy, Allott moved General Composites into the former village sheds in Westport 10 years ago.

The company has since developed a high-end resin transfer molding process for the aeronautics, sports and medical industry and just relocated to vacant space at the Industrial Park in Willsboro.

General Composites employs 44 people, drawing from a 60-mile radius. Its engineers take environmental adventure beyond an icy ski slope or roiling whitewater, striving for maximum economic impact with minimal environmental impact.

Building an environmentally smart business has opened many doors. "Made in Adirondacks" has intrinsic green benefits.

Allott said that, for his company, perceived land-use barriers to doing business in the park have not materialized.

"We've been welcomed with open arms in all situations."

### **CHALLENGES**

The real challenge to building companies, he said, is lack of incubator space — facilities

tooled for startup businesses. Infrastructure problems — from spotty cellular-phone coverage to lack of broadband Internet access — are improving in large measure as demand has increased.

And success is sculpted carefully with business acumen.

Allott strategically shifted General Composites' technical focus to heavily regulated industries when he saw manufacturing flock overseas, where companies shy away from products requiring much, if any, regulatory oversight.

## **SOLUTIONS**

Allott's story was echoed by Joe Moore, owner of Placid Boatworks, and Steve Maselli, president of Old Adirondack Furniture, two companies that also design, build and ship products manufactured in the park.

Moore started Placid Boatworks next to the Chubb River in Lake Placid six years ago, inspired, he said, by the light and classic Rushton Pack Canoe long celebrated in Adirondack lore.

And Maselli builds authentic Adirondack chairs and cedar furniture from wood harvested by certified sustainable forestry methods, then manufactured one piece at a time.

Each company set goals tuned to their own manufacturing process.

Allott said General Composites is looking to double or triple business in the next five years.

Moore said Placid Boatworks would maintain a niche product, building about 200 boats a year.

With 85 percent of all furniture sold in the United States made overseas, Maselli said, his company is poised to grow as the trend turns.

Old Adirondack Furniture was sourced by a major retailer looking for authentic Adirondack furniture and finding only one.

"The Adirondack Park is the solution, not the problem," Maselli said.

## **PRE-APPROVED SITES**

APA staff economic analyst Steve Ehrman told commissioners that opportunity for economic growth is pre-approved in the many nearly vacant industrial parks throughout the Adirondacks.

After the meeting, APA spokesman Keith McKeever said the agency is looking to change the long-held perception that business doesn't fit in the Adirondack Park, especially manufacturing.

"It really points out there is room to build business in the Adirondack Park; and by the way, there's an outstanding quality of life here."

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