



CASE STUDY - US Meltblown

The early days of the COVID-19 pandemic revealed critical shortages in the nation's supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) that has been so desperately needed by everyone from front-line medical workers to school children. Successful global entrepreneur Bob Sires, who until very recently owned American Elite Molding in Crestview, took note of the challenge. In digging deeper into the issue, he was even more disturbed to find that the vast majority of protective masks available on the market – even those touted as being “Made in the USA” – were actually utilizing Chinese-sourced meltblown polypropylene filtration material. With his extensive manufacturing background and relationships, Bob set out to change this. This is where the idea for US Meltblown (initially identified as American Elite PPE) was born.

As the pandemic raged on, Bob knew that time was of the essence. He quickly sprung into action, building a team, ordering production equipment and conducting a review of potential locations in multiple states. With his past history of successful collaboration with One Okaloosa EDC, Bob gave the organization an opportunity to make a case for US Meltblown to locate its new production facility in Okaloosa County.

The One Okaloosa team soon identified a building solution that seemed to fit the bill – a 14,000 SF building located in the Fort Walton Beach Commerce & Technology Park. One Okaloosa contacted the building owner to initiate negotiations and, as discussions progressed, began efforts to secure appropriate job creation incentives / property tax exemptions from the Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners and the City of Fort Walton Beach. Both governing bodies immediately recognized the significance of an opportunity to not only facilitate the creation of 50 new manufacturing jobs in our community, but to attract a company seeking to protect the nation from COVID-19. In the end, economic development ad valorem tax exemptions were approved and a new lease for a long-vacant building was signed.

The deal even got the attention of Governor Ron DeSantis, who was quoted as saying, “We appreciate US Meltblown's innovation and agility. American-made products, originating from right here in Florida, will not only produce reliable, time-essential goods, but help us emerge from this economic downturn stronger than ever before.”

In the end, US Meltblown was able to rapidly progress from the ideation stage to full scale proof of concept production in a matter of four months. Thanks to visionary leadership, vital partnerships and the swift work of One Okaloosa EDC, a reliable, sustainable US-based source of PPE material now successfully operates in our community, providing quality jobs and related benefits for our citizens.