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TOP STORY

Hurricane hosts WV auto expo for local suppliers

by Conor Griffith BUSINESS EDITOR Mar 7, 2019



Donna Frazier, right, and Brandon Smith display the products manufactured by the Sogefi Group plant in F
Staff photo by Conor Griffith

HURRICANE — Many of the region's small businesses got the opportunity to hook up with the big-league players in the state's automotive industry Thursday during the first West Virginia Auto Supply Chain Expo held in Putnam County.

The conference was hosted by [Toyota, NGK Spark Plugs and Sogefi Group](#). Each of these companies employs hundreds of workers, is growing and is looking to work more closely with suppliers close to home.

Donna Frazier, buyer for Sogefi USA, said the conference was a useful opportunity for bigger companies like hers to better get the word out among those who may not be so familiar with the European-based company.

"We've been in business here for 15 years and employ slightly more than 400 people," she said. "We're here because we do need to get our name out there. We do business globally, but buy from around the world and would like to buy locally."

W. Lynn Fuller, owner of Wood County-based Battery King, was among the numerous small business representatives at the expo. He said business is growing substantially around the Parkersburg area and hopes to grow it some more after Thursday's conference. He noted that the batteries most people think of — such as in cars, computers or household devices — is really just the tip of the iceberg given that they are utilized in hospital systems and a host of other systems.

John Stankus, purchasing analyst for Toyota, said the company has and still does rely on long-term partnerships in its supply chains which can often be demanding. However, he said the goal of the expo was to provide local businesses with the tools and information needed to become one of those partners.

Mike Proctor, procurement manager for NGK Spark Plugs, said his company is looking to add new suppliers in the region as well, particularly those owned by minorities, women and military veterans. He said after 25 years of operation in Sissonville, growth isn't slowing down.

"We are growing, what seems like, daily, almost that we're busting at the seams," he

said. "It only feels like days ago we put up the plant."

The list of organizations participating in the fair was a long one and ranged from county development agencies and private companies, to the West Virginia Department of Commerce and the Robert C. Byrd Institute.

The nonprofit development organization Advantage Valley was also one of the organizers. Its executive director, Terrell Ellis, pointed out the need to develop tighter networking between manufacturers and suppliers close to home.

For example, she said there was a demand of \$203,036,080 worth of automotive manufacturing parts in the region during 2017 but only 36 percent of that demand was met by local suppliers, meaning the lion's share of it came from imports. While recruiting new business is important, she said there are plenty of opportunities for already established business in the manufacturing region near Charleston and Huntington to thrive.

"I hear people say, 'I didn't even know that existed,'" she said. "This is your chance to see what's out there."

A large portion of the expo was comprised of five-minute elevator pitches between the three host companies and the attendees. Ellis said there were so many companies interested in taking part that the conference was overbooked. However, none were turned away as the expo time was extended and the host company representatives stayed longer to hear everyone out.



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Terrell Ellis addresses WV Auto Supply Chain Expo
Staff video by Conor Griffith Mar 7, 2019

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