

# The Walpole Times

## Moakley announces defense contract for Fiber Innovations of Walpole

By Tom Glynn  
Staff writer

"We really did start our business making weapons," joked Garrett Sharpless, brandishing a fiberglass baseball bat that became well-known as "the Boston bat."

That was 15 years ago in a Norwood garage. Last week, Sharpless, president of Fiber Innovations, welcomed Congressman Joe Moakley to the company's Walpole plant, expressing appreciation for a multi-million dollar defense contract.

Fiber Innovations braids fiber and adds resin to produce a strong, lightweight material, once for bats and golf clubs, now for missiles and satellites.

The day after the company stopped making its trend-setting bats, it began producing struts for the Air Force's giant C-17 cargo plane, Sharpless said.

The company came to Walpole Park South in the mid-1990s after a search for larger quarters with good highway access. With 35 employees today, it has expanded since then and some day hopes to need an industrial park of its own, Sharpless said.

"We're experts at braiding composites," he said, adding that, he and vice president Stephen Goodwin have more experience than anyone in the industry.

Fiber Innovations advanced material is credited with nailing down a billion-dollar cruise missile contract for Lockheed Martin. The Air Force initially sought a price no more than \$700,000 for each missile, and then lowered that to \$400,000. Lockheed Martin, using Fiber Innovation material, came in at \$265,000, beating out Boeing, which went with aluminum.

Fiber Innovation gave the Lockheed Martin team "affordability" and made its bid more competitive, he said. The company has been called the poster child for efforts to cut defense acquisition costs, he said.

No more \$400 toilet seats, Moakley added.

Production is expected to begin next year for an initial 2,400 missiles and with the potential for 6,000, Sharpless said.

Seventeen employees at the Walpole plant are now working on the missile program, next year there will be 50, he said.



Congressman Joe Moakley and Garrett Sharpless, president of Fiber Innovations, tour the company's South Walpole plant. The circular machine in the background braids fiber.

The contract announced last week is for launch tubes for a new shoulder-fired missile – a high-tech bazooka.

The first order is for 5,700 for the Marine Corps, with options that could amount to 15,000 a year.

Fiber Innovation, Sharpless said, has brought together skills traditional to New England: textiles and boat-making.

He also emphasized, "There's a real need for small companies to get into the defense business."

Recalling the efforts of the late Speaker Tip O'Neill on behalf of Raytheon's Massachusetts-built Patriot missile, Moakley said one of the most satisfying parts of a congressman's work is to help create jobs, especially in the home district.