



FEATURE STORY



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Outdoor Culture, Low Operating Costs, Beautiful Scenery Appeal to Lehigh Defense Company Expanding in Rapid City, South Dakota



David Fricke of Lehigh Defense stands in his newly opened facility in Rapid City, S.D.

When you run a company that makes products for sportsmen, who better to hire than individuals that are excited about and use the products – like sportsmen? That's what Lehigh Defense president Dave Fricke thought, and that is one of the reasons he decided to expand the company into South Dakota.

"When your employees are excited about what they are making and have a passion for the product, you simply can produce a far better product," Fricke said. "Of course, South Dakota's low costs, beautiful surroundings, proximity to customers, and Midwestern values didn't hurt either."

Lehigh Defense is the world's largest monolithic projectile manufacturer and focuses on products for personal defense, hunting, target shooting, as well as a wide range of interests and custom designs for the United States military.

The company also just opened its first facility in South Dakota where it will produce its projectiles. Research and loading operations will remain at its headquarters, located in Pennsylvania. Fricke says that expanding in Lehigh Defense's current location was cost-prohibitive, and doing businesses in South Dakota is less cumbersome and less bureaucratic.

"There is an ease to conducting business in South Dakota. Everyone is pro-business and people want to get things done," Fricke said. "Doing business in South Dakota is also beneficial from a cost standpoint. Natural gas, electricity, and taxes are all lower, and the state recognizes the important role manufacturing plays in the overall vitality of the economy."

Lehigh Defense uses advanced techniques and CNC machining to produce its products.

"With Lehigh Defense's technology, we can actually improve the performance of our bullets in ways that you just can't with traditional ammunition manufacturing methods," Fricke said. "Studying ballistics is a passion of mine, and I like improving the design of a projectile from a physics standpoint."



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And that improvement has spurred the company's growth.

"We've been doubling in size every year," Fricke said. "Business can be done just about anywhere, and I took that into consideration. But ultimately I decided South Dakota had the best business climate for my business to succeed."

Fricke says that with the expansion to South Dakota, Lehigh Defense is going to be in physical proximity to its largest customer and is planning to pursue contracts to design projectiles for other companies in the Black Hills firearms cluster.

"Our technology is fairly new to South Dakota in this industry, and I'm optimistic that we can create some mutually beneficial relationships with companies that are already based in the state," Fricke said. "I'm looking forward to growing Lehigh Defense in South Dakota."

For more information on the firearm industry in South Dakota, visit <http://sdreadytowork.com/Key-Industries/SHOT.aspx>.

The South Dakota Governor's Office of Economic Development will be exhibiting at the 2016 SHOT Show once again. Look for our booth, #2950. Connect with us on social media—@SDGOED via Twitter and South Dakota Governor's Office of Economic Development on Facebook.