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"ONCE YOU LOOK THROUGH OUR OPTICS, YOUR CHOICE WILL BE CRYSTAL CLEAR"

OBJ Article
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E.R. Precision Optical, which makes crystals used by defense contractors, already surpassed \$4 million in revenue so far this year. Shown: production manager Scott Stevens

E.R. Precision Optics parts go into tanks, helicopters



Made in Central Florida

Homegrown
products and
the companies
behind them

BY ABRAHAM ABORAYA

There's something to be said for holding a finished product in your hand.

What's cooler, though, is seeing that purple crystal square on an M1 Abrams tank and that tear-shaped, rainbow crystal in an Apache helicopter.

Orlando-based E.R. Precision Optical LLC, which has 19 employees, finished a move this year that tripled its footprint on the ground, going from about 5,000 square feet of production space on Robinson Avenue in Orlando to 15,000 square feet on Central

Avenue. The \$2 million investment, in a historically underutilized business zone — or HubZone — gives the company the capacity to grow germanium and silicon crystals used for night vision and targeting.

It had \$3.6 million in sales in 2010, up from \$3 million in 2009 and \$2.1 million in 2008. To date in 2011, it has surpassed the \$4 million mark.

E.R. Precision is one of the only manufacturers of those crystals on U.S. soil. "We do everything ourselves in-house," said Jason Hess, vice president of operations.

That factor also garnered it the 2011 William C. Schwartz Industry Innovation Award from the Metro Orlando Economic Development Commission.

Amy Dinsmore, director of business development for the EDC, said it was appropriate that E.R. Precision won the award because Schwartz, whom the award is named after, is considered the father of photonics in Orlando. "What they're doing is innovative. That's the kind of companies we're looking for."

So what's the next thing for E.R. Precision? The company wants to grow its business of supplying material blanks of the crystals to other companies, leveraging the fact that there are nearby large defense and aerospace companies like Lockheed Martin and NASA.

The company has an advantage: 90 to 95 percent of those crystals are bought offshore, mainly in China and Belgium. Jason Hess wants to grab some of that market "and put the 'Made in the USA' stamp on it."

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Hess



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E.R. Precision's Scott Stevens removes a piece of silicon from the polisher.