LEARJET DIVERSIFYING, EXPANDING ITS WORK

News / Manufacturer

Bombardier **Learjet** is **expanding** and diversifying its business.

The manufacturer of Learjet business jets, which operates on the west side of Wichita Eisenhower National Airport, has expanded its service center work and has begun offering to produce aircraft parts for other companies.

That's after a rough start to the year at Bombardier Learjet. In January, parent company Bombardier Inc. announced it was suspending development of the new Learjet 85, which resulted in the layoff of 620 Learjet workers in Wichita and 380 others in Mexico and a pretax charge of $1.4 billion.

David Murray, vice president and general manager of Bombardier Learjet, said the Wichita site currently has 2,000 employees. The diversification and expansion effort is helping after the "bumpy ride," he said.

"We're really happy with where we're standing now," Murray said Wednesday.

A big part of that effort is the addition of maintenance and repair of larger Bombardier Challenger and Global business jets at the Wichita service center, Murray said. It previously limited its service

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to Learjets.

The servicing of Challenger and Global jets, which are assembled and completed at Bombardier facilities in Canada, adds the opportunity for more work at the Wichita center, Murray said.

“As the volume of larger airplanes is getting bigger and bigger, there is a need in the market for us to service those airplanes,” he said. “The team has been doing really, really good, and more and more customers are coming over here (for Challenger and Global service).”

Some Wichita service center staff members had to receive additional training to work on the Challenger and Global jets, he said, but “the beauty of our airplanes is there is some commonality in our products.”

Bombardier Learjet also has begun to offer parts manufacturing to third parties.

“It’s a venture we started because we have the skill set and capabilities,” Murray said.

He said that work is primarily limited to small quantities of parts that are needed by aircraft suppliers quickly.

“We’re actually going out there and looking for the possibility of leveraging the expertise we have,” he said. That effort included renting a booth and marketing those services at the Air Capital Aviation Expo last month at Century II Expo Hall.

Murray said the additional and expanded services were implemented as a way to offset what he said was previously sluggish demand for midsize and smaller business jets.

“As it was a difficult market, the leadership team decided to look at diversifying the site,” he said.

But Murray said the focus continues to be building new Learjets. And on that front, the company is beginning to see “very good momentum on sales” of the Learjet 70 and 75, he said.

According to a General Aviation Manufacturers Association report, Bombardier delivered 14 Learjet 70s and 75s in the first half of 2015, up from eight in the first half of 2014.

The Wichita site also operates Bombardier’s flight test center, where all of the parent company’s Bombardier airplanes undergo flight testing. That includes Bombardier’s new CSeries airliner, in which the local center is “actively engaged in CSeries testing,” Murray said.

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