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## West Kingston rated among 40 best smaller markets for advanced manufacturing

In its survey, The Boyd Company cites proximity to URI, Providence and Boston, among other factors

West Kingston stands out as one of the top 40 smaller markets in the country for advanced manufacturing firms seeking new locations, according to a New Jersey firm that analyzed up-and-coming markets increasingly on its radar.

The only other New England location on the list — by The Boyd Company, based in Princeton — is Marlborough, Mass., principal John Boyd Jr. said Tuesday during a visit to Rhode Island.

Boyd said Rhode Island leaders also should be paying close attention to Connecticut, where another round of tax increases has companies such as General Electric, Aetna and others seeking less expensive places to do business. Some may end up moving their Connecticut operations to states where they already have operating facilities, Boyd said.

But even if they don't already have facilities in Rhode Island, those companies should be on Rhode Island's radar — "Absolutely, absolutely," Boyd said. "I can't underscore that enough. Connecticut's on warning. That's the climate."

Although West Kingston is ranked as second-highest for annual operating costs in those 40 locations, Boyd was undeterred in talking about the village as very attractive for the types of companies that turn to his firm for help selecting locations to expand or open new operations. Increasingly, annual operating costs are not the highest factor that companies consider, Boyd said. They're seeking places where millennials want to live, work and enjoy life.

The village of West Kingston, in South Kingstown, has features particularly attractive to advanced manufacturers, who often seek less urban environments for their facilities, Boyd said.

Among its assets:

- proximity to those associated with the University of Rhode Island, based in neighboring Kingston, who have the intellectual skill set necessary for engineering jobs;
- availability of industrial space;
- transportation infrastructure that makes it close enough, Boyd says, to Boston;
- and proximity to Providence, which is among the American cities that the company's clients view as good living environments to attract millennials.

The types of advanced manufacturing for which West Kingston is attractive, Boyd said, are composites and drone manufacturers.

Composites manufacturers are developing advanced plastics, especially to make cars, airplanes and ships lighter and more aerodynamic. There's also a big market for composites in the sports equipment industry, he said.

As for drones, Boyd said Rhode Island is uniquely attractive to that industry, which is increasingly used to analyze shoreline damage after hurricanes and other powerful storms — among many other uses.

Schneider Electric, which acquired American Power Conversion in 2007 and is in West Kingston, is among Boyd's clients. Other clients include PepsiCo, Dell, Time Inc., JP Morgan Chase, PNC Bank and Connecticut-based companies Pitney Bowes and Pratt & Whitney.

Increasingly, Boyd says, Rhode Island isn't competing merely with communities in Massachusetts and Connecticut to attract companies.

Rather, the corporations seeking new locations are more likely turning to these smaller markets in the Boyd study. The study examined communities throughout the country, including in Pennsylvania, Florida, Minnesota, Wisconsin and six locations in California, the most in any state. The most expensive place to operate among the 40 was one in Mountain View, California.

That community's total annual operating costs were determined to be \$29.9 million, above West Kingston's \$26.9 million. The least expensive annual operating costs were found in Santa Teresa, New Mexico, at \$20 million, the study showed.

Other communities included a top-ranked city per region: Gardnerville, Nevada, in the west; Lafayette, Indiana, in the central part of the country; and Pooler, Georgia, in the east. It's those communities with which West Kingston is competing, Boyd said.

Most recently, Boyd said initiatives by Governor Raimondo that became law during this year's legislative session will only improve West Kingston as a location.

The governor's plan to eliminate the sales taxes that Rhode Island businesses pay on their electricity, natural gas and heating bills was key, he said. Then, when the state learned it had higher revenue than initially anticipated, the legislature accelerated that tax elimination.

Boyd had high praise for the state's new effort to craft a statewide tourism campaign.

And he said Raimondo "wisely backed away" from the so-called Taylor Swift tax, which would have taxed high-end second homes.

Now is not the time, Boyd said, for states to unveil new taxes: "You don't want to follow Connecticut off the fiscal cliff."

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