

Industries Adapt in Time of Need, By Alan F. Rumrill

The economy has been severely impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. Many businesses have closed temporarily and some have been shuttered permanently as a result of the outbreak. Some manufacturing firms have adjusted their output, however, to remain active and to assist with the current emergency. Companies across the country and around the world have adapted their operations to manufacture essential products.

The Ford Motor Company began producing ventilators, Honeywell made face masks, and United Technologies produced face shields. Several clothing companies converted to the production of masks and medical gowns, and distilleries have been making hand sanitizer. This type of manufacturing conversion has occurred several times before in Cheshire County history in response to immediate needs during emergency situations.



Faulkner & Colony mill soon after the Civil War

Most of the previous conversions locally were in response to war. During the Civil War, for example, various local firms adapted their output to assist with the war effort. The Faulkner & Colony Manufacturing Company of Keene was one of several local textile firms that adapted to wartime needs, producing blankets and blue shirts for the Union Army. Keene gunsmith George Leonard began the production of sharpshooter rifles that were highly regarded by the military. Leather worker Warren Wilkinson converted from the production of harnesses to provide 2000 sets of leather equipment to outfit two New Hampshire infantry regiments. This equipment included waist belts, cartridge boxes, cap pouches, and bayonet scabbards.

A half-century later the United States became embroiled in another major military conflict – World War I. Once again, Keene firms modified their output to assist. When the war began Morganmade, Inc. of Keene manufactured numerous automobile parts, such as brake lights, tire pumps, spark plugs, and license plate holders. Morganmade was approached by the government when the U.S. entered the war and the plant was converted to produce hose clamps and other parts for Liberty airplane motors for the military's fledgling U.S. Air Service. One Hancock woodenware company turned out tent pegs for the Army. Faulkner & Colony once again signed a military contract, producing fuse cloth for high-explosive shells.

During World War II the Faulkner & Colony company worked around the clock, employing 500 people and making cloth for French, Russian and Norwegian uniforms. Cheshire Mills in Harrisville also made material for Russian uniforms, as well as material for military

sleeping bags. These were just two of many local firms that adapted to assist with a massive military expansion during the war.

The Sprague & Carleton furniture company on Avon Street in Keene retooled to produce gun stocks, local mines provided mica for electronic equipment, and the M.S. Perkins Machine Co. expanded its employee rolls to 450 to manufacture time fuses and bomb parts. Ninety-four percent of that company's production was allocated to war work. Keene's International Narrow Fabric Company made major revisions to its plant so it could turn out 25 million yards of material that went into helmet linings, parachute harnesses, gas masks, and other military items.

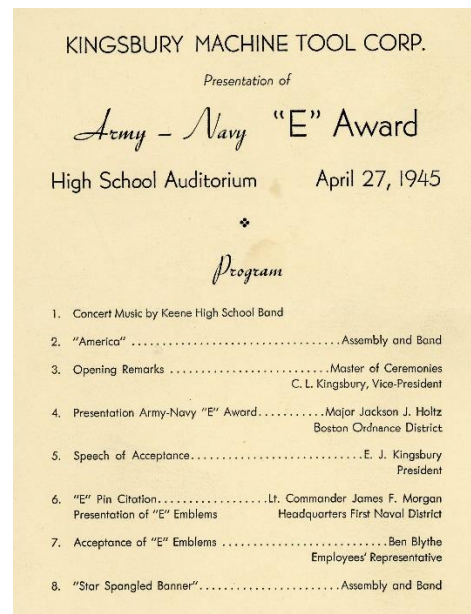


Markem Army-Navy E Award flag raising ceremony

Several local firms were awarded Army-Navy "E" Awards as recognition for achieving "Excellence in Production" ("E") of war equipment. The Markem Machine company received three of these awards during the war for its production of special marking machines, supplies and inks for use in the country's armament program. Perhaps the most jarring illustration of conversion to wartime production occurred at the Kingsbury Manufacturing Company. Kingsbury suspended its manufacture of metal toys in 1942 due to a shortage of steel and a need for war related production. During the conflict the company made military fuses, rifle bolts and other gun

components. The company literally shifted from toys to guns.

There are many examples of local industry adapting its production in times of national and international emergencies. During the Vietnam conflict some companies converted once again and the determination to assist continues in our region today. Some local companies that have responded to the current crisis are Beeze Tees, which is making face masks, and Copper Cannon Distillery in Chesterfield and Sweetwater Farm and Distillery in Winchester, both of which are producing hand sanitizer. Monadnock area firms have exhibited resourcefulness in uncertain times throughout the region's history.



Kingsbury Army-Navy E Award presentation program