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### Aveo chooses Flagler for airport, aerospace workforce

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Before settling on Flagler County as his U.S. manufacturing base, Aveo Engineering CEO Christian Nielsen had checked out mid-sized city airports nationwide.

Aveo is a global manufacturer of LED lights for aerospace, marine and other industries with harsh environments.

With customers like Gulfstream, Boeing, Lockheed Martin, and Raytheon, Aveo's U.S. market was exploding. Logistically it would be cheaper to supply product from a U.S. facility.

"We wanted to be near an airport because a lot of what we do involves lights that we stick on an aircraft," Nielsen said from his home in the Czech Republic. "And we wanted to have an air side location where we could have an actual hangar for development work where we physically modify the aircraft to get FAA approval."

He swung by Flagler County's airport on a Saturday, when by chance the county was celebrating the opening of a new hangar. On the spot, the county administrator and airport director showed Nielsen an industrial park planned along the airport's south side.

"They have a great vision for that industrial park," Nielsen said. "We weren't considering major cities, because there we'd have to compete against all the big employers for workers. And that's not our game. We have very low turnover. It's much easier to find people to come to a small town like Palm coast that's so beautiful."

The company announced it would invest \$7 million in an airport hangar and manufacturing plant in Flagler, creating 300 jobs within three years, mainly in engineering and paying an average wage of just above \$40,000.

Aveo, in the interim, has rented a warehouse and plans to begin production in October in order to fill contracts that already total \$60 to \$70 million.

Flagler County's unemployment rate hangs at 10.4 percent. Nielsen though, sees that as an asset. The company produces proprietary technology and trains all of its workers.

"In Florida, there's a plethora of unemployed engineers from the NASA shut downs," he said.

Aveo is the fifth company in two years to be lured by Flagler's assets and its business-friendly ways. Nielsen said the county's streamlining processes to move businesses in was a big selling point for him.

Nielsen, who was born in Miami Beach, said "I've spent 20 years in Europe. I don't even know most of the rules and regulations or practices in the U.S. anymore. They had an expert on their staff for everything - from HR to hiring practices to salary levels, screenings, health plans. Any question we needed. They made the process seamless for us."

Learn more about Flagler County's [economic development streak and the new county department](#) behind it in this week's edition of the Business Journal.



An artist rendering of the hangar planned by the Aveo Engineering Group at the Flagler County Airport. The company says it will create 300 jobs.

Michele Scotto Trani

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