

FOCUS: MANUFACTURING

Aeroblaze heats up the competition

New startup offers only aerospace flammability testing in DFW

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Though one's chances of dying in a plane crash are one in 11 million, The Travel Channel tells us 40 percent of airline passengers are afraid of flying.

People might be less afraid if they knew Andres Feghali. His Aeroblaze Laboratory's job is to make sure the interior mate-

rials in the planes meet safety regulations in case of fire.

There are only a handful of aerospace flammability testing labs nationwide, and Feghali, Aeroblaze CEO and lab manager, says his company offers something no one else does. "We have the fastest turnaround time," he said. "We have a two-day turnaround. Typically, you'll see three to five days or longer." The company, located in far north Fort Worth, also offers competitive pricing and a completely online system from request to data delivery.

"We focus on three things,"

Feghali said. "The first is, obviously, cost. The second is turnaround time. The last is convenience."

Feghali has dreamed of owning his own business since high school. After completing an MBA degree that included an entrepreneurship class with a business plan project, and submitting that project to the University of Texas at Arlington Business Plan Competition and winning, he knew he had just the thing.

"I'd been saving up since high school, really, to start a business," he said. "Then in 2015 or 2016, I knew what

I was going to spend that money on. I put most of my own money into it and then also took a bank loan for what I did not have."

Feghali founded Aeroblaze after some experience with fire testing as an engineer with Parker Hannifin and an introduction to fire testing for aerospace interiors from an entrepreneurship classmate.

It was during that fall 2015 entrepreneurship class that he won the November 2015 Business Plan Competition. He quit his job the following April, joined TECH Fort Worth in January 2016, and Aeroblaze

was officially open for business in November.

TECH Fort Worth "has been really helpful in terms of getting my company up and running," Feghali said. "They provide mentors ... and for me, having never opened a company before, it's really helpful to have these mentors who can guide me through all the aspects of business that aren't my strong suit."

Although he says running his own business is not what he expected, and in some cases is more challenging than he would have thought, he enjoys

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AEROBLAZE LABORATORY

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being able to work with his wife, make his own decisions and see the results.

"I love working," he said. "I know many people who don't say that, but I'm doing something I really love and I do work hard and it's nice that the reward I get from this is directly correlated from how hard I work."

One thing he's learned is the need to be flexible.

"I have plans, but what I've seen is it's really my customers that determine what my plan is," he said. "Customers approach me and say, 'Hey, will you do this testing for us,' and then that opens a new pathway for me to do something else."

It's not pointless to have a plan, but there has been a learning curve and process for both him and his wife as they moved into business ownership and Feghali switched from one focus to another within his chosen industry.

In the industry, there are two main focuses testing labs can take - interior material and engine or power plant testing.

At Parker Hannifin, the focus was on the power plant side though Feghali was exposed to fire testing during his work there, he said. He originally figured he would focus on the power plant side as well, but market research showed a need for interior materials testing nationally and internationally.

"The aircraft interior side is like a whole new world that I hadn't been exposed to before so there's a lot I had to learn early on," he said. He's still hoping to add the power plant side when the business is well established.

Aeroblaze offers five basic tests that cover almost every material in an airplane interior, as well as tests for seatbelts and cushions, cargo component materials, and wiring and cables.

As part of the focus on convenience, and in an effort to "bring more of the 'internet age' into testing," Aeroblaze

has gone paperless, providing clients with online portals for requesting tests, seeing test results and downloading reports.

Four tests, all but the seat cushion test, are done in a chamber where material samples are exposed to a 1,500-degree Bunsen burner flame for 12 seconds. Three measurements are taken: the burn

"WE'VE HAD CUSTOMERS FROM TURKEY, GERMANY AND THE U.K. SO FAR."

Andres Feghali, CEO and lab manager, Aeroblaze Laboratory

length, the burn time after flame removal and the length of time anything dripping from the material stays aflame. The test is pass/fail. The material

must have a burn length of fewer than 8 inches and a burn time after flame removal of 15 seconds or less.

The seat cushion test is

"more fun with a bigger flame," Feghali said. The cushion is put on a metal seat frame sitting on a scale, hit with an oil burner flame for two minutes and measured for weight loss and burn length. It also is pass/fail. No more than 10 percent of the weight can be lost and burn lengths must be 17 inches or less.

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nity volunteer; **Allen Goben**, Tarrant County College North-east; **V'Ann Giuffre**, AGEucate LLC; **Diane Hildreth**, Republic Services; and **Steve Meek**, Linebarger, Goggan, Blair & Sampson, LLP. **Rachael Met-calf**, Council of PTAs president, has been appointed to the board for a one-year term.

Board members reelected to serve a second three-year term include: **Matt Condit**, Strategic Wealth Management; **Matt**

Eiserloh, Medical City Alliance; **Mandy Eliot**, Keller Williams Realty; **Rohn Olson**, Bell Helicopter; and **Dallas Rainwater**, Ameriprise Financial.

Volunteers elected to a one-year term as director emeritus were: **Shalyn Clark**, Shalyn S. Clark Insurance & Financial Services; **Jeff Corbet**, Jeff Corbet, D.D.S.; **Terry Leach**, Leach & Fox Attorneys at Law PC.; **Brent McIlvain**, Edward Jones Investments; and **Shannon**

Rosson, community volunteer. The foundation has awarded more than \$770,000 in grants to classrooms and campuses since 1995. In the 2016-2017 academic year, it awarded 20 grants totaling \$50,000.

In addition, each spring the foundation recognizes 33 outstanding high school seniors from L.D. Bell, Trinity, KEYS and the Buinger Career and Technical Education Academy in 14 fields of study and their

teacher mentors through the Awards of Excellence program.

HONORS & AWARDS

For the third time in its 39-year history, Fort Worth-based **Texas Jet Inc.** ranked No. 1 in *Professional Pilot* magazine's annual PRASE survey of the top fixed-base operators in the United States.

The Texas Society of Certified Public Accountants honored **Justin Lauderdale** 3

as a 2017 TSCPA Rising Star. Lauderdale is with Admire Sanford & Associates PLLC and has 15 years of experience in public accounting. He is a member of the school board of St. Paul Lutheran School. He is treasurer of the Fort Worth Christian Prayer Breakfast and has served on the Greeting Committee for the Fort Worth Stock Show and Rodeo.

Send newsmakers to Robert Francis at rfrancis@bizpress.net.

AEROBLAZE

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Beyond the five basic tests, Aeroblaze plans to add others and is able to provide specialty testing customers may request including flammability testing for flight attendants' portable breathing equipment and engine seals testing.

Aeroblaze has multiple clients

in the Dallas-Fort Worth area including Alliance-based GDC Technics, Dallas-based Robinson Aircraft Interiors and other smaller companies, but there also is an international market because of the small number of fire test labs worldwide.

"We've had customers from Turkey, Germany and the U.K. so far and we're talking with customers all over, so they come

from anywhere in the world," Feghali said.

"We've been speaking with a lot of big companies here and they're interested in using us, but in this industry, there's a lot of certifications that labs have to get and we're working on getting all those certifications, but we're still missing a few," he said. "They've expressed interest in us after we're able to get

those certifications."

Aeroblaze has the fundamental ISO-17025 certification, the accreditation specifically for test laboratories issued by the International Organization for Standardization. Feghali is still acquiring two more certifications.

"The two we are missing are from Airbus and Boeing," he said. "So, those two companies

being the two biggest airplane manufacturers, they provide their own certifications to test labs and those are the two that we're missing."

Aeroblaze now offers 36-hour turnaround testing – the fastest in the industry, Feghali says – for manufacturers of materials such as leather, composite and foam. Competitors can take three or more days, he said.

TOUR

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and Bill Gates.

Walking into the air-conditioned Bass Hall was a respite that we desperately needed 30 minutes into the walking tour. Once inside we met our volunteer docent, Sue Drautz, who would take us through the building, into the audience chamber and down to the tunnel that connects the hall to Maddox-Muse Center across the street. The tunnel from Maddox-Muse is how the hall gets its electricity as there is no electrical or mechanical equipment in the audience chamber.

Perusing the halls toward the audience chamber, Drautz called our attention to the plane wire used in railings throughout the building, which references American Airlines, one of the major donors for Bass Hall's construction.

Going into the audience chamber, our eyes were immediately drawn to the blue midday sky lit up in purple LED lights on the ceiling.

Drautz told us that Bass Hall art such as the ceilings of the audience chamber and the corridors were painted by twin brothers Stuart and Scott Gentling.

"In that sky, you might see two golden eagles the Gentlings painted

to represent themselves," Drautz said. "Three sections to the right of the birds is a crescent moon in honor of their late mother, who encouraged them to do their artwork."

She noted that the west corridor dome was painted to depict the western afternoon sky in Fort Worth, with the east depicting the eastern morning sky.

While we stared at the ceiling, Drautz mentioned that math enthusiasts would know that the circle in the center of the dome was designed using the Fibonacci sequence.

"It's like a flower that blooms and each petal comes out from the center and is graduated larger as it comes out, and that's how the marble in the floor is also," Drautz said.

She then called our attention to the three smaller replica domes in the upper gallery, one of six sections in the chamber.

Sitting in the cavernous hall, we learned the tale of Bass Hall's ghost light.

The ghost light, Drautz said, is from the Elizabethan era when all theaters were rumored to be haunted, so they made sure to always leave a light on the stage so the theater would never be completely dark.

"Ours is on a pedestal and rolls and it's always in the center of the stage if

nothing else is going on," Drautz said.

When the Bass Hall tour was over, Donna explained why she and her husband take time out of their weekends to embark on these journeys.

"Tim and I give the tours because we love Fort Worth," she said. "We're really proud of what the Bass facilities has done and also what groups like Downtown Fort Worth Inc. have done for the downtown area to promote culture and residential properties and restaurants and tourism to this area."

The group has been giving tours for about four years, offering about 14 different experiences throughout the year. One of their coming tours follows the

announcement of XTO Energy's exit from Fort Worth and looks at the six historic buildings the company currently owns.

The "XT-Uh-oh" tour on Aug. 12 will look at the past, present and future of these buildings. Tour guides will meet participants in the meeting room of the T&P building, 221 W. Lancaster Ave.

"We believe it's important to connect people not only with what's here right now, like Bass Hall, but with the history, how things like this got here," Donna said. "All this connects to where we are today and how we got to this point. We love the people and we love the city and that's why we do it."

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