

Fighter jet manufacturer hopes prototypes take off

By DAVID TROESTER
Business First

NATO's next line of fighter jets could be manufactured from Niagara County if Stavatti Corp. of Minnesota relocates to the Wheatfield Business Park.

The company hopes to be in operation in the former Bell Aerospace Textron plant by January and is reviewing financial incentives offered by Empire State Development Corp. and the Niagara County Industrial Development Agency.

"We really like the area, we want to move in there," said Phillip Goebel, Stavatti senior vice president.

The company is working to secure financing for the move and seeks to initially lease 30,000 square feet in the 1.8 million-square-foot business park. Company officers recently visited the plant and are continuing negotiations.

Stavatti would produce Stalma (short takeoff advanced light multi-role aircraft) at the plant. Projected to cost \$24.96 million per jet, Stalma is designed to compete against five aircraft in the next 15 years: Lockheed Martin F-16C, Boeing F/A-18C, British Aerospace Typhoon, Dassault Rafale and Saab JAS 39 Gripen.

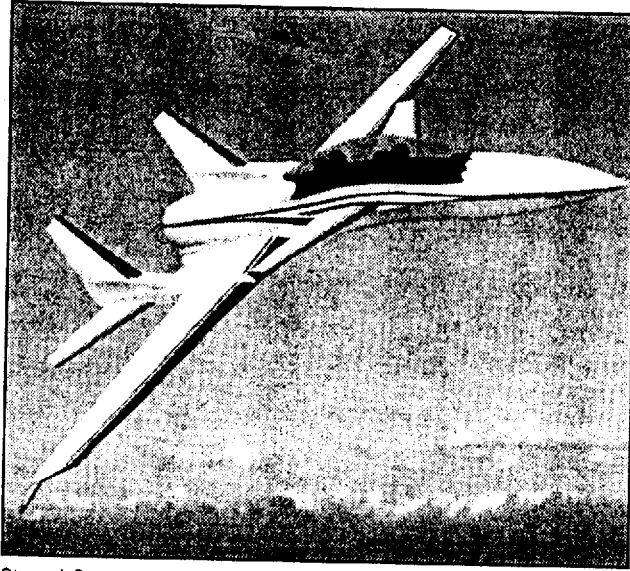
"It's designed to outperform the F-16 in all areas of the envelope," Goebel said.

Stalma export projections range from \$17 billion to \$34 billion, satisfying a market niche for about 1,500 international fighter sales.

In addition, company officials hope Stalma will meet the U.S. Air National Guard's long-term interceptor needs with sales potential of \$15 billion.

"We'll build the prototypes, then validate the military design, then seek production contracts from the United States as well as NATO countries," said Goebel.

Prototype Stalma should be built some-



Stavatti Corp. says it wants to build aircraft in Wheatfield. The Minnesota-based company has designed the Sleek, above, a two-seat sport plane and a fighter jet.

time in late 1999, he said.

"When we get into production we're going to need 625,000 square feet of manufacturing space," he said.

Stavatti employs 30 engineers, physicists and management personnel at Richard E. Fleming Field, a municipal airport in South St. Paul, Minn. It plans to employ 112 in Wheatfield by early 2000.

"The goal of the company is to become one of the prime contractors for U.S. aircraft," Goebel said.

The company also developed a two-seat, sport utility aircraft, the Sleek.

Goebel said the Wheatfield site is not in competition with other locations for Stavatti operations.

"We'd really like to put the military operations at that facility," he said.

Stavatti is looking to establish a composite production facility in Virginia, he said.

Neither Goebel nor local officials would discuss incentives offered to Stavatti by the IDA or Empire State.

"If it's approved, if they agree to come here and if they begin actually selling their aircraft, it could be the most significant project in New York state in decades," said John Simon, Niagara County IDA executive director.