



Photo provided by FSC Cutting Tools Technology LLC

FSC Cutting Tool and Technology gets a boost from an underused state Department of Commerce program

Qualifying companies can be reimbursed for selected trade show and other expenses related to growing exports.

AUGUST 10, 2017

by Guest Contributor

Surrounded by the roar of jet airplanes outside and the din of the crowds inside, Afzaal Mir and his wife, Raana, manned their Greenville company's booth in the South Carolina pavilion at the Paris Air Show and marveled at their situation.

"I feel that my story should be told to Americans," says Mir, who arrived in the U.S. from Pakistan decades ago. He now owns FSC Cutting Tool and Technology, located on Old Buncombe Road.

"That's the greatness of this country — that someone like me could come at 18 years of age, and make this happen. You can't do that in many countries," Mir adds.

Mir's father worked for Pakistan Airlines, and he began flying at age 15 in Pakistan. In 1978, he traveled to the United States to earn his Federal Aviation Administration license, and moved to Greenville at the urging of friends. "I was immediately in love with Greenville," he says.

Mir flew charter flights while trying to get a job with a commercial airline, but full-time jobs were tough to find. He applied for work near the airport at a company called Tungsten Industries that made cutting tools for the aerospace, automotive, and woodworking industries, among others.

At Tungsten, Mir was asked to set up a quality control department. Soon after, he became a plant manager and remained with the company until 2006, when he stepped out on his own.

In the meantime, Mir had married Raana, his childhood sweetheart from Pakistan, and raised a family. As he began FSC, his wife became his professional colleague.

"When I started the company, we had nothing — no customers, nothing. Just my vision," Mir says. "We worked hard. ... We were everything — janitor to running tools."

The name is a shortened form of "Five Star Carbide," combining the material used in tool making with the company's five focus sectors: automotive, aerospace, die mold, electronic, and woodworking.

Though not a trained engineer, Mir knew cutting tools and believed he could build a business based on service and custom technology that was targeted and nimble.

At the beginning, he designed the tools and found other small companies to manufacture them. His goal was to build a reputation for quality that would help him qualify for business with larger companies.

"So I got qualified — slowly, slowly," he recalls.

Within two years, he had 15 employees and soon bought a 60,000-square-foot building and 4 acres near Furman, where he is now. Today, he builds the machines that make the tools his target industries use.

FSC now counts Northrup Grumman, Gulfstream, Lockheed Martin, and Triumph Aerospace as clients, but the company's marquee customer is Boeing.

"Qualifying for Boeing is a different environment," Mir says. FSC became a qualified Boeing supplier in 2014, eight years after going into business.

In seeking more skilled employees, Mir contacted local educators a few years ago, which ultimately led him to the state Department of Commerce.

"I want you to help me so that I can create jobs," Mir says he told the department. "You help me; I'll create jobs. That's how it is."

Now, the state Department of Commerce is helping Mir attend major trade events such as the Paris Air Show by underwriting some of the costs through a program called the [Export Incentives Program](#).

The program, funded with both federal and state dollars, is open to all budding state exporters. Qualifying companies can be reimbursed for selected trade show and other expenses related to growing exports. The program, still relatively new and growing, is run through the Department of Commerce's international trade division.

According to the department, Greenville-Anderson-Mauldin is the 22nd largest metro area reporting exports nationwide; 85 percent of South Carolina exporters are companies with fewer than 500 employees. The vast majority of South Carolina exports are in the transportation field.

That fits FSC's profile perfectly for now — but perhaps not for long.

"My logic in coming here was that I will get to know every manufacturer, anything to do with aerospace," Mir says. "That way I will know who is doing what. I can find a distributor, and then I can start doing business here. Now, we feel comfortable that we can go to the next level."

Trip DuBard, Founder and Director, SC Connect

