


Trendsetting CEO spurs manufacturing growth

 **Online:** Hear Roger Layne talk about his company.

BY RYAN HARRIS

STAFF WRITER

Roger Layne has taken East Tech Company Inc. from a tiny upstart venture to a major manufacturing presence in the Chattanooga market with \$5 million in annual sales.

Now he needs new workers to fuel an even more ambitious growth plan.

"With the workforce growing old and some of the baby boom-

ABOUT HIM

■ **Name:** Roger Layne
 ■ **Age:** 57
 ■ **Occupation:** Chief executive and owner of East Tech Company Inc

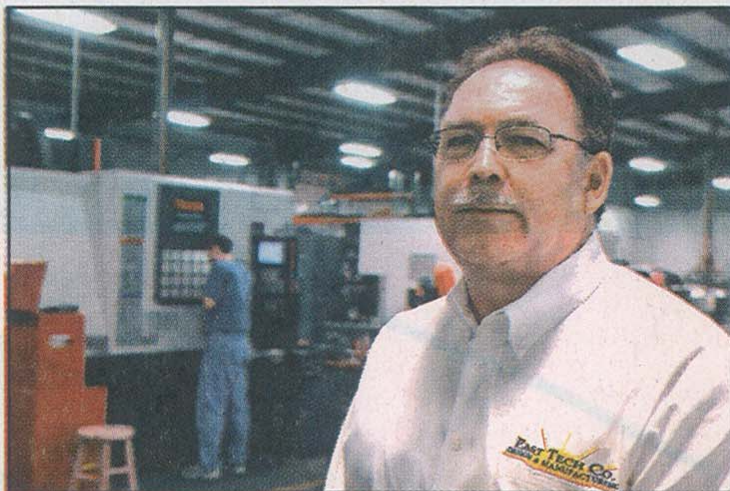
ers retiring, we are not getting the talent we need," Mr. Layne, 57, said. "The future of manufacturing and Hamilton County's

growth and the new high-tech industry of nuclear power, all that is going to be requiring good, high-tech students." Mr. Layne is partnering with Chattanooga State Technical Community College to train students. He is offering scholarships and hands-on training in his facility for both students and instructors.

"We're going to prove to everyone that manufacturing is a rewarding career, and modern manufacturing is a very safe and clean environment," he said.

Mr. Layne said he is keeping East Tech Company viable by constantly updating technology. He hasn't been hampered by economic challenges, spending \$500,000 a year on new equipment since manufacturing began in 2004.

"We can't worry about things we can't control," Mr. Layne said of the slumping economy's impact on manufacturing. "Interest rates hurt us as



STAFF PHOTO BY KELLY WEGEL

Roger Layne is CEO of East Tech Company Inc., which uses mostly computerized machines to cut and drill metals and plastics.

far as borrowing. But our business has been driven by adding new customers, and customers have increase sales."

East Tech Company makes products for asphalt-paving company Roadtec and parts for the Tennessee Valley Authority's hydroelectric plants.

Mr. Layne wants to expand his presence in the nuclear industry. Only 5 percent of his business is in that arena now, but he foresees it dominating 50 percent of East Tech's portfolio in five years.

The first five-year plan set by Mr. Layne was met. He went from operating out of half of a 10,000-square-foot building on South Creek Road to a 30,000-square-foot site in the Centre South Riverport Industrial Park on Amnicola Highway.

Mr. Layne wants to triple the company's size by 2012. East Tech Company now employs 40 people.

"(East Tech) is absolutely one of the most successful start-up companies in recent years for the Chattanooga area," said J.Ed. Marston, marketing director for the Chatta-

nooga Area Chamber of Commerce.

Chattanooga Mayor Ron Littlefield described East Tech Company as "a local success story" in a Chamber of Commerce news release.

"It is especially gratifying to see a Chattanooga native fulfill his dream of running his own business," the mayor said. "He is precisely the kind of business entrepreneur we are trying so hard to encourage and to keep in Chattanooga."

Mr. Layne treasures his Chattanooga roots.

East Tech's name pays homage to Mr. Layne's upbringing at East Side Junior High School and Kirkman Technical High School. The company's sun logo represents new beginnings for Mr. Layne, who left the Tennessee Rand company after 22 years to start East Tech.

"After (Sept. 11), I realized you might not be here tomorrow," he said. "Every day you should make a difference. I wanted to see if I could do something on my own, and help the community at the same time."