

Aviation manufacturer looking for a rebound

Cessna Skycatcher might be the ticket for Dayton's PITCO, which makes parts for the low-cost aircraft.

By Thomas Gnau, Staff Writer

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DAYTON — On good days, Geoff Hoefflin believes the propeller-airplane market might just be warming up.

Now, Hoefflin and his company — East Dayton manufacturer PITCO Aerospace Inc. — need the industry to take off.

“We need to rebound,” Hoefflin, PITCO general manager, said from his Terry Street facility this week.

In December 2008, the chief executives of General Motors and Chrysler were hammered for flying on private jets to Washington, D.C. to testify before Congress. That public relations mishap soon became a nightmare for makers of commercial airplanes, like Cessna Aircraft Co., who saw business plummet.

That reverberated back to Cessna suppliers, like PITCO and Dayton's Integrity Manufacturing.

PITCO saw revenue of \$1 million in 2008, Hoefflin said. That fell to less than \$500,000 in 2009. Hoefflin expects to regain the \$1 million mark again in two to five years.

“What disappeared in a quarter will take at least that long to come back,” Hoefflin said.

One bright spot may be the Cessna Skycatcher. A small single-engine two-seater plane aimed at the pilot training market, the Skycatcher is priced at \$112,000 — relatively low for a new private plane. Cessna has had more than 1,000 orders for the plane.

PITCO — a producer of aluminum and metal parts, including propeller spinners — has made 50 parts for the Skycatcher so far, a decent run, Hoefflin said. He anticipates another 100 parts this year.

Doug Oliver, a Cessna spokesman, said the general economy is stabilizing from his company's point of view. But the aircraft industry is not rebounding, he added — at least, not yet.

Cessna delivered 289 business jets in 2009, Oliver said. The company's original forecast called for 535 business jets that year, he said. And today, Cessna doesn't expect an upturn in the general aviation market until late 2011, he said.

Oliver said that, generally, the industry will see a rebound first among lower-priced aircraft, like the Skycatcher.

“It will be a slow climb,” Oliver said. “It will not be a dramatic rise.”

Hoefflin believes the propeller aviation market will lead a resurgence in general aviation by four to eight quarters. If the Skycatcher catches on, then, that would be good news for PITCO and manufacturers like it.

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