

# THE SUN

Thursday, January 30, 2020

\$1.50

FACEBOOK.COM/LOWELLSUN

TWITTER.COM/LOWELLSUNNEWS

lowellsun.com

## LOWELL

# UTEC woodworking facility gets help from Eastern Bank



PHOTO COURTESY OF NICOLE CHAN PHOTOGRAPHY

UTEC was recently awarded a \$100,000 grant from Eastern Bank to help in the development of its new woodworking facility on Church Street. From left, Will Vilas-Novas, UTEC's director of Workforce Development; Bob Rivers, CEO and chairman of Eastern Bank; UTEC young adult Katie Robinson; UTEC graduate Ginny Chhoun; Gregg Croteau, CEO of UTEC; and UTEC Major Gifts Officer Sue Gladstone.

### By Aaron Curtis

[acurtis@lowellsun.com](mailto:acurtis@lowellsun.com)

**LOWELL »** The development of UTEC's new woodworking facility received assistance in the form of a \$100,000 grant recently provided to the organization by Eastern Bank.

Eastern Bank's investment is part of UTEC's growth campaign to raise funds

in the pursuit of job opportunities and pathways for young adults in the Merrimack Valley returning from incarceration or leaving gang activity, according to a UTEC press release.

The release states Eastern Bank's grant will be used to renovate the 28,500-square-foot space on Church Street that will be the future home of

UTEC's woodworking facility. The funding will also support professional staff for high-skill training, and advance youth trainings as they begin to expand the range of products made at the facility and the number of jobs offered to young adults.

"We're thrilled to receive this generous gift from Eastern Bank," said UTEC CEO Gregg Croteau in the release. "

Partnerships like this propel us forward as we seek to serve more young people in the Merrimack Valley.”

Bob Rivers, chairman and CEO of Eastern Bank, commended UTEC on 20 years “of providing pathways to social and economic success for young adults in Lowell and across the Merrimack Valley.

“ UTEC is constantly innovating and we are proud to support the expansion of its businesses and job skills training programs, and the many people who have benefited from them,” Rivers said in the release.

UTEC has worked to identify drivers of success in their revenue- generating, job creating businesses including food service and recycling, the release states. It plans to invest in infrastructure and operations to increase annual enrollment capacity with their young adults.

Part of the expansion process began in December, when UTEC signed a lease- to-

purchase agreement for the future home of their woodworking facility at 70- 80 Church St. The structure was formerly occupied by Towers Motor Parts.

The space allows room for machinery, production, shipping and receiving operations. It will also be used to showcase finished work for sale.

UTEC will first renovate the 70 Church St. portion of the building and expects to occupy that space sometime this summer. The second phase of the project will consist of renovating the 80 Church St. side of the property, which will include a storefront where all UTEC- made Madd Love Market goods will be sold.

Croteau said the acquisition of the property and phase one renovation costs are approximately \$1.2 million. The phase two renovations are expected to be an additional \$ 2 million.

UTEC’s woodworking program began roughly five years ago in a small rented space

on Crosby Street. At the start, they had only two pieces of machinery. It currently occupies a fullcapacity, 3,000- square- foot rented garage on Williams Street.

The program quickly grew as UTEC struck up partnerships with companies like Whole Foods Market, to sell items produced by the young adults.

Last year, UTEC was recognized by Whole Foods as their North Atlantic Supplier of the Year for their handcrafted line of wooden cutting boards, UTEC’s release states. UTEC was selected out of more than 2,000 vendors.

According to their website, Eastern Bank is the oldest and largest mutual bank in the United States and is the largest community bank in Massachusetts.

For more information about UTEC and its social enterprises, visit [utecinc.org](http://utecinc.org).