FRC East announces winners of first industrial Innovation Challenge


The challenge that was launched in June aimed at improving production within the facility and was open to all FRC East employees. Altogether, 23 innovative ideas were submitted from the workforce. Of those, the top five ideas were selected in September where the teams proceeded to the design, development and prototype phase. The final presentations were made at FRC East to its command leaders, and NAVAIR and COMFRC leaders who watched via teleconference Jan. 31.

The winning idea was a Dynamic Component Liner Blasting tool that addressed the problem of trying to hold on to small components with oversized protective rubber gloves while blasting it with more than 1,000 pounds per square inch of blast media. The idea was submitted by John "Jack" Burbine and Scott Burkhart, who additively manufactured a Dynamic Component Liner Blasting tool that secured components while blasting, thereby
ensuring retention and the integrity of the part.

Second place was awarded to Maria Gaskill, industrial material analyst, for designing a new tail rotor dolly that improves safety and product preservation while transporting H-53 tail rotor blades. Third place idea was submitted by Samuel Chaisson, Bernard Pannell and Scott Thurston, who designed a drive shaft maintenance tree cart that reduced the amount of space taken up by the drive shafts on the production floor while also enabling better evaluation of the components before being installed on aircraft.

The winners received cash awards of $2,000, $1,500 and $1,000 respectfully.

“It was a rewarding journey,” said FRC East Commanding Officer Col. Clarence T. Harper III. “It turned out to be a blessing for me, the command, and those individual who participated. All of the ideas were well received.”

“We are looking for ways to explore and implement all the ideas submitted,” he said. “This challenge has given us the chance to improve our operations here at FRC East, and help NAVAIR improve Enterprise practices.”

According to Martin Ahmad, deputy commander for Fleet Readiness Centers, the idea to hold the challenge at an FRC was based on an observed pattern with other NAVAIR challenges.

“We know that the innovation really comes from the workforce,” said Ahmad. “The innovation challenge is about giving [the workforce] the opportunity to come up with ideas to help change the game.”

According to Ahmad, messages delivered by the Chief of Naval Operations and the Commandant of the Marine Corps to leaders are the impetus for such a challenge. That commentary expressed the urgency for a force more innovative that will increase Navy and Marine Corps readiness, warfighting capabilities and America’s resolve.

“We can’t rest assured that we are number one,” said Ahmad, during the kickoff event in June. “In the end, whoever wins the conflict is the country that can get the equipment on the field and aircraft in the air, and that’s what we’re challenged to do.”

Ahmad further encouraged the workforce to continue pushing ideas forward, especially with the backing of an encouraging team of leaders.

“I hope that you don’t have to wait for an innovation challenge again to come up with ideas,” he said. “You have a whole leadership team here that is 100 percent behind good ideas that will make our operations safer, provided higher quality or improve throughput. … We’re here to invest and do that.”