JACKSONVILLE, Fla. – Fleet Readiness Center Southeast is using every tool in its toolbox to get aircraft to the warfighter more quickly, including new toolboxes themselves.

The modernization of the facility’s production line that repairs, maintains and overhauls Navy and Marine Corps trainer aircraft is a multi-faceted approach involving digitalization and lean processes.

“These toolboxes allow us to run a cleaner, more efficient line by decreasing the number of tools we keep near the aircraft by half, and decreasing the number of toolboxes by one-third,” said T-6 supervisor Todd Theobalt. “It also helps us be better stewards of taxpayer money by keeping better accountability of tools.”

To determine exactly what tools the artisans needed in the toolboxes, close to the aircraft, supervisors turned to their workforce.

“They asked us to put together an inventory for the toolboxes,” aircraft mechanic Tom Fotos said. “I think the guys did a great job, because we have the tools that we know we need.”
To refine the inventory further, the toolboxes keep a running list of which tools are used and how frequently.

“The program actually has a usage log to determine whether we have too many of one tool or not enough of another tool,” Theobalt said. “So once we get through a couple months of that usage log, it’ll help us determine the inventory going forward.”

Having the right tools close to the artisan increases efficiency by reducing trips to the facility’s central tool room. Efficiency will be the name of the game for the trainers team.

Recently named as the sole source of repair for the Navy and Marine Corps’ T-6 Texan II aircraft, the line will be inducting 57 planes per year by 2021.

In addition, the boxes can hold calibrated tools and keep track of their calibration date to let artisans know the tools are accurate.

Along with a move to digitize technical publications and increase efficiency in other areas, the toolboxes are another step towards modernization. It’s the fruit of what Fotos said is a positive culture at the trainer line.

“The supervisors and leadership take our input and try to implement our ideas,” Fotos said. “That shows in our attitudes.

“We get a lot of work done, but we’re also cracking jokes and smiling in the process.”