



*Photo by Dede Smith*

## **Pauline Sevigny, GRACE Aerospace, Success Story – 2023**

*By Lorrie DeFrank*

With the strong support of JAX Chamber programs, Pauline Sevigny has substantially grown the family business she moved to Florida to join in 2017. President of GRACE Aerospace since 2020, she also credits the company's capable and dedicated engineers and other professionals with its award-winning successes.

A native of Long Island, New York, Sevigny had a 20-year career in financial

services in Massachusetts when her father recruited her to be part of the business he co-founded in 2001 with a group of former colleagues from Northrop Grumman. GRACE Aerospace opened a satellite office in Jacksonville in 2014 and in 2017 moved its manufacturing operations from New York to Jacksonville's Cecil Commerce Center where it employs about 25 people. It primarily manufactures electrical components and structural components for military aircraft.

Sevigny is quick to point out that although she is by no means a manufacturing expert or engineer, her background as an operational auditor required her to learn new processes and connect with people who showed her how operations work. "That gave me a strong foundation and a lot of confidence to know I could do this," she said. "I am a huge proponent of hiring people who are smarter than you and leaning on them for advice. Collectively, as a team we get it done well and on time."

Sevigny sought the expertise of JAX Chamber and the Jacksonville Women's Business Center (JWBC) to help her set and attain goals, and strategize growth opportunities.

She now owns GRACE Aerospace with her parents, Robert and Laurel Carlo, with the women having 51 percent ownership. Sevigny was approved by the Small Business Administration to become a certified woman-owned small business.

When the company started, it was focused on obsolescence resolution for aging aircraft. Although it still works with customers on older aircraft and does work directly for the Department of Defense, it recently expanded to get into the Department of Energy and NASA, Sevigny said. "One of our big contracts is working with Vertex Aerospace on a trainer aircraft, and another big customer has been working with Tactical Air Support, right at Cecil Field. It's great being in close proximity with customers," she said.

Recognized as Manufacturer of the Year in 2022 by the First Coast Manufacturers Association, GRACE Aerospace doubled its revenue in the past year. Strategies to grow and enhance operational processes and procedures, and reach out to customers, were developed largely through the guidance of specific JAX Chamber and JWBC programs.

Sevigny first became involved with JAX Chamber when she was accepted into Cohort 13 of its entrepreneurial enhancement program JAX Bridges in the fall of 2020. "That was a great kickoff," she said. "We revamped our capability statement as well as our marketing pitch. It made our fundamentals stronger."

The refined capability statement, essentially the company's resume, became critically important, especially to customers like the Department of Defense that demands quick key information points. "We get a lot of compliments on our capability statement," she said.

Through JAX Bridges, Sevigny learned about JWBC and its *ATHENA PowerLink* premier mentoring program that links accomplished business owners with a panel of advisers handpicked based on their industry and needs. She was accepted into JWBC's then new Hyperconnected Mentoring program designed to help potential ATHENA participants get organized and set expectations for the more intense ATHENA program. Sevigny said it was a great springboard to the year-long *ATHENA PowerLink* program, from which she graduated in March.

Sevigny praised the program that was tailored to her needs. For example, because the Department of Defense has stringent security regulations, one of her mentors was Sara Slettebo, who works in government contracting as a cyber security expert. One of Sevigny's defined needs was scalability through an enterprise resource system. "Through the ATHENA program I talked to various experts about how to do this and meet cyber security requirements and be in U.S. Government compliance," she said. "I used my mentor panel to determine what system to go with and we decided to use our existing system that now is in compliance."

"Pauline is an exceptional business owner," said Slettebo, president, ReMilNet, LLC. "Relying on her strong financial foundation and desire to truly understand both her customers and staff, she works tirelessly to remain engaged on all business fronts. She is able to assess current business operations and use this information in support of future strategic goals."

"The more I became entrenched in JWBC I started learning more about their various tentacles throughout JAX Chamber," Sevigny said. "Resources in Jacksonville are superior to most, and they are accessible."

Sevigny strongly urges any business owner, male or female, to take part in programs that JAX Chamber and JWBC offer because they are current and relevant to today's business environment. She expressed gratitude to the staff members who have been her guiding force in improving her business the past three years. "Everything they are doing is proving its worth. I'm seeing success on my end and I attribute it to many great people supporting me and the GRACE Aerospace team."

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