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## Coronavirus Florida: Sales boom at this Riviera Beach air purifier factory — so do jobs

By Susan Salisbury Special to the Post

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Sales of RGF Environmental's patented equipment are booming. The products have been shown to kill 99 percent of viruses and keep them from spreading — but the Riviera Beach company says its equipment has not been tested specifically against COVID-19 yet.

When Mathew Charles of RGF Environmental Group heard about the coronavirus outbreak in China late last year, he knew that demand for the Riviera Beach-based company's indoor air purification systems would increase.

"When it started to come over to the U.S. a fire drill went off," Charles, RGF's vice president of national air product sales, said Thursday. "Today we had 760 orders by 10 o'clock this morning. It's crazy."

In February the wave of requests from heating, ventilation, and air conditioning, or HVAC, contractors RGF sells to worldwide, especially for its hospital units, began to hit.

RGF's patented equipment has been shown to kill 99 percent of viruses and keep them from spreading. However, neither RGF nor anyone else has tested such systems specifically for COVID-19 yet. RGF is not making any medical claims that its equipment provides a line of defense against the coronavirus.

RGF, situated on nine acres with 130,000 square feet of manufacturing, warehouse and office facilities in the Port of Palm Beach's Enterprise Zone, is a certified research and innovation company. Ron Fink, CEO and president, founded the company in 1985.

"We've had about a 500 percent increase in sales across the board -- residential, commercial, hospitals and assisted living facilities. We can't keep up. We are running three shifts, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We have 180 employees and growing," Charles, who has been with RGF for 13 years, said.

Prior to the December outbreak of the respiratory disease that is now a pandemic, the company had 140 employees. Since then, it has hired 40 new employees in all departments including shipping, production, accounting and customer service and expects that to continue. Jobs are posted on Linked In. The company asks that no one contact it by phone about a job.

In a typical month prior to COVID-19, RGF might ship 10,000 units, Charles said. Now there are 50,000 or so units on backorder, and the wait has increased to eight to 12 weeks from four to six weeks.

"We have had to focus a little more on New York," Charles said. "The rest of the country is super-busy as well. The U.S. is proactive with this type of thing."

The company manufactures about 100 models of air purification systems. It also makes water and food purification equipment, but demand for that has held steady.

Because demand from hospitals and first responders has skyrocketed, RGF has put manufacturing of residential equipment on hold for now. But Charles said that HVAC contractors who work with brands such as Trane, Carrier and York might have some residential purification equipment on hand.

Charles said that RGF's systems use hydro-peroxide and are placed in HVAC ductwork. The advanced oxidation technology neutralizes airborne pollutants including bacteria, viruses, odors and mold. Third-party testing on H1N1 and Avian influenza demonstrated inactivation rates of 99 percent within six hours.

"We haven't tested for COVID-19. Nobody has. We tested all the other coronaviruses such as H1N1 when that came up," Charles said.

That said, the company says there's no reason to think that the air purification systems won't kill COVID-19 in the air and keep it from spreading, as it does with other coronaviruses. But without testing specifically for the virus at the center of the global pandemic, the company won't go any further than to say there is the potential.

"We can't make that claim," Charles said. "Anybody saying they kill COVID ... nobody has been able to test it, so they can't make that claim."

The company is evaluating testing options with partners in both the U.S. and China.

RGF sells to distributors in 60 countries, including India, Dubai and China. Deliveries to China are going by ship and that can take six to eight weeks. The Chinese government used RGF's systems to help prevent the spread of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, or SARS, and Avian flu.

"Nobody can plan for a pandemic," Charles said. "It's impossible. We upped our levels. We are just now starting to get behind and should be back up by the end of April."

Charles predicts that even after the pandemic is over, interest in indoor air quality will "go through the roof."

"The awareness that will come out of this will be huge. People will be concerned," Charles said.

