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## 'Crazy' months for stimulus-linked factory

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A year ago, had you asked Alan Levin about the highest accolade of his career, he probably would have pointed to his mention as an up-and-coming manufacturer by Window & Door Magazine.

But that was before the White House came calling.

And President Obama cited him in the 2010 State of the Union address.

And CNN and ABC World News interviewed him.

And Vice President Biden's staff blogged about him.

The last few months have been nothing short of "crazy," marvels Levin's wife, Fran.

And it got crazier Friday around Northeast Building Products - the window factory that Washington has anointed its star of stimulus spending.

A phalanx of reporters followed Levin, 42, as he gave a tour of his Bridesburg plant to Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Shaun Donovan, with Mayor Nutter and Gov. Rendell in tow.

"You are the best example in the country," Donovan told Levin, "of what the economic recovery act has done in getting the economy back on track."

Not one of the best. *The best.*

Since last summer, more than \$100 million in stimulus funds has flowed from HUD into Philadelphia's housing and redevelopment agencies - and from there into construction-related businesses. At Northeast Building Products, thousands of orders for windows have come in.

Homeowners, meanwhile, are buying up the company's energy-efficient windows in order to take advantage of \$1,500 tax credits.

Sales are up 39 percent. The factory has almost doubled its workforce, to 285, and gone to a 24/7 schedule.

Friday's visit felt like a pep rally, and indeed, Donovan had something to cheer. Earlier in the day, the Obama administration had announced an increase of 162,000 jobs in March, the highest employment jump in three years.

After a one-hour tour of the factory's production line, Donovan stood before an American flag and

proclaimed to workers, "More than 100 of you are here for one reason - because President Obama signed the economic recovery act into law."

All the screeching and banging and pounding on the factory floor stopped for a moment as VIPs took turns talking up the stimulus spending.

Standing on the factory floor with other employees, Dave Dorman, 27, of Fox Chase, who was hired 10 months ago, said he was skeptical of the president's plan at first. But "you can see it right in front of your face," he said. "It's working."

Northeast Building Products was started 35 years ago in the garage of Irv and Elaine Levin, Alan's parents.

Last year, its workers made 200,000 energy-efficient windows, of which 130,000 qualified for tax credits.

In HUD stimulus money for Philadelphia, PHA got \$126 million for capital projects, while the RDA recently won a competitive bid for \$44 million to restore foreclosed homes.

The Housing Authority is adding 900 apartments, requiring 8,000 windows from Northeast Building Products, said Carl Greene, PHA's executive director.

The Inquirer featured Northeast Products in a front-page story on Sept. 20, 2009, showing how stimulus money was trickling down from HUD to PHA to local companies and workers. ABC News picked up the story. HUD and the White House took note.

On the morning of Jan. 27, Levin got a call from a White House speechwriter. She said the president might want to mention his company in the State of the Union address. Would that be OK? "Ten minutes before 9, she called back and said, 'You made the cut. Go watch TV,' " Levin recalled.

In defending his stimulus plan, Obama told the nation, "Talk to the window manufacturer in Philadelphia who said he was skeptical of the recovery act until he added two shifts due to the business it created."

"Within three minutes of that, I got an e-mail from CNN saying, 'We need Alan immediately,' " said Fran Levin, 39, an executive vice president of the business. ABC News and Bloomberg TV included the company in stories about stimulus spending. U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke, meanwhile, held up the company as an example of "green" jobs at a 2009 U.N. Climate Change Conference in Denmark.

On Monday, Fran and Alan Levin were packing for a family trip to Germany and England when they got the call from HUD. Donovan wanted to visit.

Fran and the couple's two children canceled their vacation, but Alan had to keep an appointment to inspect a new \$2 million production line made in Stuttgart, Germany.

He returned Thursday afternoon - just in time to take a call from a staffer in the vice president's office. The White House had included an item about Levin on a blog about recovery success stories. "He's floating," Fran said of her husband after his whirlwind week.

Their son Austin, 13, also is soaking up his private lesson in stimulus spending.

"This really made me listen more and look more into what is happening in the country," said Austin, a seventh grader at Abington Friends School.

The president, he added, "has given me a secure future."