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**MAINE MEP- MANUFACTURERS’ “BEST FRIEND” - JOINS
SENATOR OLYMPIA SNOWE’S
SMALL BUSINESS MANUFACTURING FORUM**

BREWER – Rod Rodrigue, Executive Director of the Maine Manufacturing Extension Partnership (Maine MEP), today addressed a gathering of small and medium manufacturers from across the state as a panelist of U.S. Senator Olympia Snowe’s Small Business Manufacturing Forum in Brewer, Maine. Snowe, Chair of the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, reaffirmed her continuing commitment to the prosperity of Maine’s small manufacturing community, hosting this forum designed to give those businesses an opportunity to meet with and hear from organizations that offer assistance to firms struggling to overcome the current downturn in manufacturing.

According to Rodrigue, “At a time when small U.S. manufacturers are under unprecedented pressure from foreign competition, when manufacturing has been experiencing devastating job losses, and when the profitability of small manufacturing enterprises is experiencing the most severe pressures ever, the Maine MEP is the best friend Maine manufacturers could have.”

Along with representatives from the Small Business Administration (SBA), the Maine Patent Program, the SBA Government Procurement office, Eastern Maine Development Corporation and the U.S. Department of Commerce, Rodrigue was invited to explain some of the services available to small manufacturers in Maine. Maine MEP is a nonprofit business advisory service which has historically received significant funding from the National Institute of Science and Technology (NIST), U.S. Department of Commerce. In the most recently measured one year period¹, Maine MEP clients have reported that as a direct result of their projects with Maine MEP they have:

- preserved and grown their sales by nearly \$12 million
- retained or created more than 500 jobs

During the same period, the state as a whole experienced a loss of over 2200 manufacturing jobs. The Maine MEP has had such a strong impact by providing several kinds of services, according to Rodrigue. “We help the manufacturing community in several ways,” he said: “Adoption of industry best practices, elimination of waste, technological skills enhancement, and transfer and commercialization of technological innovation are the traditional services.”

Rodrigue went on to say that once manufacturers have adopted best practices, what they need most is more business. “We need to provide small manufacturers with immediate rapid access to defense and commercial supply chains,” Rodrigue added.

¹ Four calendar quarters ending Q3, 2003

The New England Manufacturing Supply Chain (NEMSC) initiative, implemented by Maine MEP in collaboration with the six New England states, is designed to create opportunities for new business by matching small New England manufacturers which might have under-utilized capacity with other complementary skills, certifications or capabilities. It is expected that the combination of companies might qualify for procurement opportunities that would be beyond their reach individually. The defense supply chain initiative is anchored by a database that will facilitate matches between defense industry needs and New England manufacturers' collaborative capabilities.

Grant funding for this initiative will allow the Maine MEP to conduct no-cost capabilities assessments of participating manufacturers and to design programs to help those small enterprises mitigate any shortcomings they may have with respect to defense industry specifications.

“The same technology and database can be used on behalf of commercial supply chains as well, said Rodrigue

While participation in the NEMSC initiative is limited to small and medium manufacturers in the six New England states, the expectation is that they will have the opportunity to bid on defense industry opportunities from larger companies located all around the United States. New England's smaller suppliers will have a new degree of visibility throughout the entire defense industry supply chain,

Manufacturers interested in participating, as well as those who would simply like more information should call the Maine MEP directly. For more information, please call 1-800-637-4634 or visit www.mainemep.org, and click on the New England Manufacturing Supply Chain link.

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