

**For Immediate Release**  
**January 25, 2005**

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## **Portland Company Pins Hope on Maine MEP**

PORTLAND – Project managers at the Maine Manufacturing Extension Partnership recently helped officials at the Portland-based jewelry manufacturing company Designs by Lucinda eliminate a production bottleneck that has dramatically increased the company’s business.

“Clearing our production bottleneck has allowed us to reduce our finishing time from 4.5 days to 1.5 days,” said Mike Reynolds, general manager of the jewelry manufacturer. “Best of all, the savings we realized from that change were invested into increasing our sales team, which has yielded a 14 percent increase in sales for 2004.”

“We are always delighted to hear a success story such as this,” said Rod Rodrigue, president of the Maine MEP. “Designs by Lucinda had specific problems that needed to be addressed quickly and efficiently.

“The Maine MEP project managers knew that time was definitely a factor in addressing the production bottleneck and took that into consideration when initiating Lean training and recommending changes in production.”

MEP’s project managers actually did several things for Designs by Lucinda. In addition to addressing major and minor production bottlenecks, the project managers also conducted Timewise 101 Lean training, value stream mapping and Kaizen events.

“Time was of the essence,” John Karp, Maine MEP technology transfer project manager, said, “because Designs by Lucinda increases from 35 to 70 employees during its busiest times, and we wanted to ensure production bottlenecks would be reduced before the company realized its annual rush.”

Designs By Lucinda has an interesting and oft-told history. A cause-related business dedicated to creating affordable jewelry of the highest quality for the purpose of bringing financial help and awareness to non-profit organizations and their causes, the company was started by and owned by Lucinda Yates. Providing uniquely designed, handcrafted

wearable art that benefits social causes through symbolic representation and whimsical creations, Designs by Lucinda has sold more than four million pins and has helped raise \$21 million since the company's inception in 1989.

The company's primary products are lapel pins cut out of paper products, multi-layered and all hand made. Unfortunately, a production bottleneck was created during the final phase as the coating used to produce a glossy finish caused bubbles to form.

"The company actually had eight to twelve employees just fixing those bubbles," Karp said. "They had to cut open each bubble and recoat the pin, slowing down the production line."

In an effort to address the situation, MEP's project managers suggested a change in the coating process and urged Designs by Lucinda's officials to seek a \$10,000 seed grant from the Maine Technology Institute to purchase production equipment for the new process.

Once it received funding from MTI, company officials tested the new coating technology. The results were outstanding, eliminating the vast majority of rework at the company. The change smoothed out the largest bottleneck at the company, and business increased dramatically. As sales increased, other smaller bottlenecks emerged and Maine MEP once again suggested the company apply for grants from the U.S. Department of Labor to cover the costs of company-wide Time Wise<sup>®</sup> 101 Lean training, value stream mapping, and Kaizen events.

"Maine MEP was very helpful, both in eliminating a key bottleneck in our process and smoothing out other areas by introduction of Lean manufacturing principles," said Reynolds.

"Though we are a privately held business and do not discuss numbers, I can say that MEP has played a role in dramatically increasing our production capacity, and this has led to significant expansion of the company," he added.

The Maine MEP is an affiliate of the NIST under the U.S. Department of Commerce. The national MEP is a network of manufacturing extension centers that provide business and technical assistance to smaller manufacturers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Through MEP, manufacturers have access to more than 2000 manufacturing and business "coaches" whose job is to help firms make changes that lead

to greater productivity, increased profits, and enhanced global competitiveness. For more information on the Maine MEP program call 1-800-637-4634.