

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Friday, May 29, 2009

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:
Muriel Mosher, Maine MEP
207-623-0680
murielm@mainemep.org
Brian Sutherland, NMDC
207-498-8736
brians@mainemep.org

Maine MEP Training Cuts Production Costs for Aroostook Orthodontic Manufacturer

Lean Training Helps Acme Monaco Improve Efficiency

Presque Isle, Maine: For more than 60 years, the company known today as Acme Monaco has specialized in custom wire product manufacturing. Founded in 1947 as Acme Spring, it developed in the 1950s into an international automotive parts manufacturer by producing quality components for General Motors. In 1970 the product line was expanded to include orthodontic hardware, which it manufactures at its facility in Presque Isle, Maine.

With its company's corporate office based in New Britain, CT, Acme Monaco's growth has been accompanied by a commitment to quality assurance. Recognizing the value of international quality standards, it became one of the first companies in its industry to achieve ISO 9002 certification in 1996. Through the years, the Maine Manufacturing Extension Partnership (Maine MEP) has worked with Acme Monaco to help it become a Lean manufacturer, driving improvements in the efficiency of its production processes and helping reduce production costs.

With a sizeable number of new hires, Acme Monaco's plant manager in Presque Isle recently decided it was time to bring Maine MEP back to train a dozen new employees.

"As every Lean practitioner knows, at the core of Lean lies the central tenet of continuous improvement. Training should never be a one-time event. We've worked closely with Maine MEP over the years, so I decided it was important for our new employees to receive the benefits of Lean training," said Mark Jarrett, plant manager for Acme Monaco in Presque Isle.

Looking to help the company with the cost of training, Maine MEP/NMDC Project Manager Brian Sutherland worked with Acme Monaco to obtain a grant from the Northern Maine Development Commission (NMDC). Through its Small Manufacturing Industry Effectiveness Program (SMIEP), NMDC provided 50 percent of the Lean training cost.

Grants Help Northern Maine Manufacturers Implement Lean Training

The Northern Maine Development Commission provides grants to small manufacturers in the NMDC service area through its Small Manufacturing Industry Effectiveness Program (SMIEP). The grants are provided to qualifying businesses for as much as a 1 to 1, dollar for dollar match of the company investment. Grant payments are made directly to training providers such as Maine MEP, so companies do not need to pay upfront and then wait for reimbursement. For more information about the program, contact Brian Sutherland in the Maine MEP Aroostook County office at NMDC at 207-498-8736 or by email at brains@mainemep.org.

The MEP project manager conducted Lean Awareness and 5S programs. The 5S is a simple but effective set of techniques that remove waste from a workplace environment through better workplace organization, visual communication and housekeeping improvements. The training set the stage for a set up reduction process in the company's arch machine area. The set up reduction in the orthodontic hardware was crucial in creating a process for the operators to analyze their system.

The Acme Monaco plant manager touted the efficiency improvements his employees came up with during the MEP training sessions. The improvements, in turn, led to significant cost reductions for the company.

"During this process, the operators came up with a more efficient kitting process. It creates a more beneficial flow and reduces the time required for operators to produce the products, which in turn saves us thousands of dollars in this area alone," said Jarrett.

The MEP project manager noted the importance of quality assurance, as well as production efficiency in manufacturing medical and orthodontic products.

"The medical products manufactured by Acme Monaco must meet U.S. Food and Drug Administration safety standards, while their orthodontic wire assemblies are among the most important features of the product," Sutherland noted. "Any product failure can be aggravating for patients and costly and time-consuming for orthodontists. That's why the company places great emphasis on the quality of its products. Without a reputation for reliability, the company wouldn't have been able to remain competitive for more than 60 years. We're pleased that Maine MEP has been able to help Acme Monaco manufacture its products more cheaply and efficiently, while maintaining that commitment to quality."

About Maine MEP

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 or visit www.mainemep.org.