

## **Falcon Performance Footwear Selected as Maine MEP 2011 Manufacturing Excellence Award Recipient**

### **Award Recognizes Success in Innovating through Economic Development Partnerships**

Auburn, Maine: The Maine Manufacturing Extension Partnership ([Maine MEP](#)) today announced that Falcon Performance Footwear will be awarded the Maine MEP 2011 Manufacturing Excellence Award. The Auburn-based firm has been making footwear in Maine for more than four decades. By developing innovative products and utilizing the full arsenal of Maine's economic development programs, the company has succeeded in flourishing while other Maine footwear manufacturers have been forced to close their doors.

The award will be presented to Falcon by Senator Susan M. Collins at a ceremony at the firm's manufacturing facility in Auburn at 11:00 am today. The award is given each year to a Maine company that has demonstrated outstanding leadership, vision and manufacturing excellence. Senator Collins has been a strong champion of the national Manufacturing Extension Partnership program. The award ceremony will include Maine Economic and Community Development Commissioner George Gervais, representatives from other Maine congressional delegation offices and top state economic development officials.

"Falcon Performance Footwear serves as a model for how Maine manufacturers can grow even in the toughest economic times," said Maine MEP Chairman Bruce Pulkinen. "When Carl Spang assumed leadership of the company in 2007, he recognized that innovation and production efficiency were the keys to survival. Falcon took advantage of state resources to develop high value-added products that utilize advanced materials and meet the highest safety standards. Furthermore, by incorporating the principles of lean manufacturing into its plant layout, the firm achieved substantial cost savings and developed a production capacity with enormous flexibility and rapid ability to respond to customized orders. This combination of innovative products and production flexibility has enabled Falcon to succeed by expanding into new markets."

[Falcon Footwear](#) was founded in Lewiston in 1963 and over its history made work boots and traditional footwear for L.L. Bean, Dunham, Timberland and Cabela's among others. In 2006 Falcon was selected by Globe Firefighter Suits to manufacture a revolutionary new boot for firefighters. Using an athletic show platform rather than the traditional stiff welted sole, its new leather boot incorporated ceramic toe caps, five layers of Kevlar and a unique metatarsal guard to provide unmatched protection and comfort.

The company's success in developing innovative products has been achieved in part because it taps the resources available through Maine's economic development agencies and the University of Maine. Applying for a seed grant from the Maine Technology Institute, Falcon began working with UMaine's [Advanced Manufacturing Center](#) to develop a composite toe cap for its industrial, mining and firefighting boots. While the sheet-molded composite is used widely in the automotive industry for bumpers and car parts, it had not been manufactured in the U.S. by footwear firms, but instead had only been available from high tech Chinese manufacturers. The R&D initiative succeeded, allowing Falcon to manufacture toe caps for its new line of footwear in the United States, rather than outsource the toe caps to China.

The company emphasizes continuous product innovation. Among its more recent innovations is the incorporation of radio tracking systems (RFID) into its mining boots, so that mining companies can more easily pinpoint the location of trapped miners. This product innovation was also accomplished with funding assistance from an MTI seed grant.

"The Falcon Performance Footwear story illustrates the challenges facing manufacturers in our nation and our state. Its success demonstrates the ingenuity, energy, and determination that enable our

manufacturers to meet those challenges,” said Senator Susan Collins. “Falcon has had a great partner in this endeavor – the Maine Manufacturing Extension Partnership. During the last decade, Maine MEP has assisted Falcon in all aspects of Next Generation Manufacturing Strategies, including workforce development, innovation, and global engagement. The results of this partnership are remarkable. Improved productivity, increased sales, and new products for new markets, combined with reduced energy and transportation costs, are helping to create American manufacturing’s most important product – good jobs.”

Maine MEP has worked with Falcon since 2001 to improve its production efficiency, workforce training, plant layout and strategic planning. Last year, when the firm decided to relocate its facility from Lewiston to Auburn, Falcon called upon Maine MEP to assist it with the new plant layout. After extensive value stream mapping and five Kaizen events, the project team arrived at a dramatic breakthrough in its production process.

The new production process reflects a shift in orientation that emphasizes rapid customization. The batch size produced by each line worker was cut from 23 to 3 pieces. Instead of producing large quantities of goods for inventory, the new line produces to order. In some cases product ordered one day can be shipped the next day. This has resulted in lower inventory costs and improved throughput.

Falcon’s penchant for innovation has led the company to look for growth opportunities. The firm has capitalized on its technological sophistication to develop new products and at the same time aggressively sought global markets through trade missions led by the Maine International Trade Center ([MITC](#)).

“Falcon’s success exemplifies how public-private partnerships can strengthen Maine’s economy,” said George Gervais, commissioner of the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development ([DECD](#)). Success begins with visionary business owners. But for small companies to succeed in the global marketplace, they often need strong strategic partners. In Falcon’s case, they recognized the value of Maine’s economic development community. Strategic planning and lean manufacturing training from Maine MEP, R&D funding from MTI, advanced engineering research and prototyping from UMaine and global market analysis and export assistance from the Maine International Trade Center all helped the company achieve notable growth and unique success. It’s a recipe I’d encourage all Maine firms to follow.”

“We’re deeply honored to receive the Maine MEP 2011 Manufacturing Excellence Award,” stated Falcon President Carl Spang. “Our company has a commitment to product innovation and is driven to produce the highest quality American-made footwear. We’ve succeeded with assistance from our many partners and the dedication of our 54-member workforce. I’m proud to accept this award on their behalf.”

## **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](http://www.mainemep.org).