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FHC Named 2012 Maine MEP Manufacturer of the Year

Neurosurgical Products Manufacturer Recognized for Innovation Engineering Success

Bowdoin, Maine: The Maine Manufacturing Extension Partnership (Maine MEP) today announced that FHC, Inc., a neuroscience equipment manufacturer, has been named the 2012 Manufacturer of the Year. The award is being presented in celebration of Manufacturing Month.

From its headquarters in Bowdoin, Maine, FHC serves a global neuroscience community with precision instruments and comprehensive technical support. Recognizing that innovation is the key to future growth, FHC has created a culture where innovation flourishes, leading to the design and manufacture of more than 7,000 unique metal microelectrodes and a broad range of state-of-the-art clinical and research instrumentation. For its success in demonstrating how a continual focus on innovation can enable a mid-size Maine firm to become a global leader in the field of neuroscience, FHC has been selected as the MEP manufacturer of the year.

The award will be presented today at 10:00 a.m. at FHC headquarters, located at 1201 Main Street, Bowdoin. The award is given each year to a Maine company that has demonstrated outstanding vision, leadership and manufacturing excellence. George Gervais, Department of Economic and Community Development Commissioner, will facilitate the ceremony. Participants will include top state economic development officials, local state legislators and representatives from the Maine congressional delegation offices.

“In honoring FHC as the 2012 Maine Manufacturer of the Year, we celebrate a company that recognizes the key elements of success in a competitive global economy,” said Bruce Pulkkinen, chairman of Maine MEP. “First, the company has focused on innovation as a central business strategy and has created an Innovation Center that partners with customers to anticipate and solve their needs. Second, they have invested in their workforce by training them in advanced innovation techniques, creating a Great Ideas Group that challenges team members to find new solutions. Third, they continuously improve their operations by applying lean manufacturing techniques, starting with the establishment of their own internal lean champions. And fourth, they have embraced global markets for their products, opening offices in Europe and South America, while looking to expand in Asia. This combination of internal and external strategies exemplifies what it means to become a next generation manufacturer.”
Founded in 1970, FHC has served the neuroscience community for more than 40 years. The company’s clients include scientists and clinicians studying at major universities, medical schools, research hospitals, government research institutions and private laboratories located at pharmaceutical, biotechnology and technology-based companies around the world.

Maine MEP project managers have worked with FHC over the past two years to provide Innovation Engineering management coaching and lean manufacturing consulting that have helped achieve product and process improvements.

“Every manufacturer recognizes that innovation is the key to long-term success, but many companies find it one of the most challenging goals to attain. FHC has distinguished itself by the way in which it has institutionalized the processes for generating new ideas and rapidly testing them for commercial success,” said Gervais. “Through this process, FHC is able to collaborate with clients and bring new products to market in exceptionally short time-frames with minimal waste of money and time and hence minimal risk. This application of the principles of Innovation Engineering has enabled a Maine firm of 100 employees to achieve an international reputation in its field.”

FHC’s focus on collaboration includes recognition of its role in the local community.

“We are pleased that FHC is committed to staying in Maine and works hard to be a valuable community asset,” said John Butera, Senior Economic Advisor to Governor Paul LePage. “It provides on-site childcare and fitness centers for its employees that are also open to the general public. And the firm each year awards thousands of dollars in higher education scholarships through the FHC Community Education Foundation.”

“On behalf of our entire company, FHC is pleased and honored to be selected as the Maine MEP Manufacturer of the Year. Truly this recognition goes to the entire team, globally, who ensure that FHC products are designed, manufactured and delivered to our customers with superior quality and performance. With our guiding principle of innovation through collaboration, we are humbled to work with our customers to provide pioneering solutions for neuroscientists and neurosurgeons worldwide. This award is testimony that Maine firms can compete with the best in the world,” said FHC’s CEO Keri S. Seitz.

October is Manufacturing Month

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A Case Study in Innovation Engineering

FHC’s marketing team identified a challenge facing some of its European customers who preferred to use a 28 cm DBS lead. With a shorter DBS lead (most US customers use a 40 cm lead), it can be difficult to remove the insertion tube without disturbing the placement, so European users were placing the leads ‘freehand’ without a guide tube to ensure its precise placement. FHC was challenged to find a solution: How to place a shorter 28 cm DBS lead using an array insertion tube?

In 2011 the FHC Great Idea Group tackled the problem. The first concept proposed was a ‘peel away sheath inserter’ that could position the lead and then be peeled away. But employing the process of Innovation Engineering the group identified possible complicating issues and rapidly moved on to a second idea: develop a metal telescoping tube that would be short enough to be removed with a 28 cm lead. Guided by the Innovation Engineering process, FHC was able to develop and produce its first batch of telescoping insertion tubes that were ready for European distribution in less than a year.
October 2012 has been designated as Manufacturing Month to highlight the importance of manufacturing in the U.S. economy. Maine MEP in conjunction with Manufacturing Extension Partnership centers around the country are celebrating manufacturing excellence in cooperation with the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM).

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.