

# Participants rave about lean manufacturing training

BY NICHOLAS SHANNON KULMAC | VBJ

"I can't say enough about it. It really opened my eyes to a different way of thinking."

That's the overall consensus from Donn Bash, inventory manager at Smith-Root Inc., and other participants of a recent Manufacturers Lean Consortium, funded by the Southwest Washington Workforce Development Council (SWWDC) through a state grant.

The program, a unique 10-day mix of classroom and on-site customized training, featured four participating local manufacturers (Smith-Root, Cadet Manufacturing, CID Bio-science Inc. and Last US Bag Co.) and encompassed a number of topics including: lean manufacturing, computer skills, supervisory training, project management and ISO certification.

Partnering with SWWDC on the consortium was Clark College, Lower Columbia College and Impact Washington, the state Manufacturing Extension Partnership agency. Instruction was provided by Keith McPhun, director of operations for nLight Photonics.

"We had been working with some small businesses that couldn't afford to do customized training on their own," explained Bonnie Moore, director of business services for the SWWDC. "Customized training for lean can cost anywhere from \$35,000 to \$80,000 for a manufacturer. So what we ended up doing was designing a consortium for multiple businesses and then coupled it with a grant, thereby reducing the cost."

Michelle Giovannozzi, Clark College's corporate relations manager, said feedback from

participating businesses following the consortium has been overwhelmingly positive.

"The learners found the lean training to be a springboard for improvement," Giovannozzi wrote in an e-mail to the Vancouver Business Journal. "They learned effective, practical principles that are easy to follow and implement in their respective organizations. They also learned that lean principles not only apply to manufacturing processes; they can be employed in administrative environments, as well."

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of the lean training experience, according to the participants, was the fact that they spent two days at each company implementing hands-on projects.

"The proof is in those eight days

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we spent at other companies,” said Bash. “The results were just amazing. And our management team has been pretty impressed with what they’ve seen. Now they’re planning on having some executive training in lean manufacturing come October. I cannot stress enough how much I enjoyed that class.”

Bash said Smith-Root has been able to reduce its product repair turn-around time from 14-and-a-half calendar days to just eight days – a result he directly attributes to the lean training.

“The results from the two days we spent here at Smith-Root have been tremendously beneficial to our customers,” added Bash.

Will Macia, president of Last

US Bag, said his company also witnessed measurable success as a result of the training.

“In one cell, we were able to take about a 23-24 percent reduction in workforce labor per part,” said Macia. “That’s a very measurable statistic of value. And the great thing is we’ve basically rubber stamped that same process and now we’re applying it to each individual cell within the company.”

Macia said lean manufacturing is the only direction his company will continue to move toward at this point, calling it “common sense manufacturing.”

“Lean manufacturing has always been our target and we’ve always practiced it, but never in a formalized way,” Macia explained. “So this training was a wonderful opportunity for us to have experienced leaders to come into

our facility and give us hands-on, day-to-day, real world application at a significantly reduced cost over what we would typically pay a consultancy to do.”

Given the positive feedback from participants, Moore said the SWWDC plans to continue and sustain this lean training model moving forward so that other local businesses can benefit. Unfortunately, Moore said, grant dollars have dried up, so the agency is trying to get creative about how to do it. However, Giovannozzi said Clark College also has access to state and federal funds, so businesses should not hesitate to inquire.

“I would love to see more companies get involved in this sort of thing,” said Bash. “I think it’s very valuable.” **VBj**