

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

National Wheel-O-Vator Co. Inc.

Illinois Manufacturing Extension Center

National Wheel-O-Vator Rides Lean

Client Profile:

National Wheel-O-Vator, based in Roanoke, Illinois, is an established leader in the vertical platform lift market. The company is also fast becoming an emerging force in the production of residential and small commercial Limited Use/Limited Application elevators.

Situation:

At Wheel-O-Vator, manufacturing an elevator is strictly build-to-order. No finished goods are carried. "If you see an elevator in process here, we're shipping it. Nothing waits," says Rick Crane, Operations Manager. The company's cost of goods is heavily influenced by the rising prices of steel and lumber, the two principal components in an elevator. To offset those costs, Wheel-O-Vator had to better manage inventories, optimize materials through standardization and effective design, reduce scrap, and achieve one-piece flow. Over the course of 5 years, the Illinois Manufacturing Extension Center (IMEC), a NIST MEP network affiliate, had assisted the company in a variety of areas, from Lean to Total Quality Management and SPC training. Once again, National Wheel-O-Vator contacted IMEC for assistance.

Solution:

IMEC conducted a Lean Certificate Series, a multi-week primer on the fundamental lean concepts, including Value Stream mapping and Pull/Kanban systems, for 10 associates of the company. In 1988, Wheel-O-Vator built about 300 elevators per year. Today, the company produces almost 6 times that amount, with far less Work in Process, and purchased goods inventory. "We now have an elevator coming off the line every 57 minutes at the Takt Time, or buying rate, of the customer," said Crane.

Results:

- * Increased production of elevators by 600 percent.
- * Reduced inventory by \$50,000.
- * Decreased labor hours by 50 percent.
- * Achieved a more competitive and profitable position.

Testimonial:

I've been very pleased with the assistance we have received from the Illinois Manufacturing Extension Center. Our teams have gained a great deal of confidence in their understanding of lean concepts. This education, and the buy-in that has followed from our team members, has provided us with the ability to implement the lean principles that have helped us remain competitive and profitable in our industry. "

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Rick Crane, Operations Director