Successful Montana companies to Share Challenges and Triumphs at Conference October 4 and 5

By Deborah Nash, MMEC

Helena – The spotlight will focus on three Montana companies that are competing successfully in three very different markets during the statewide manufacturing conference “Compete Smart,” coming to Helena on October 4 and 5. Featured in the segment called “eXtreme Challenges” are Marks-Miller Post & Pole of Clancy, Semitool of Kalispell and Diversified Plastics, Inc. of Missoula.

Since 1998, this segment has been a favorite with participants, offering valuable insights based on real experience within industry. It is a regular highlight of the biennial conference that draws manufacturers from across Montana. Organizer of the Montana Manufacturing Extension Center, a Montana State University outreach center in Bozeman and co-hosted by North-Western Energy, the event will also include an acclaimed keynote address “the Art of Vision” with Erik Wahl. Area plant tours, select training sessions and a special student showcase are additional conference features.

More of the Montana mystique will be unveiled during the closing luncheon when a special guest will deliver remarks and wrap-up the two day event. The main conference activities will be at the Great Northern Helena Hotel.

During the eXtreme Challenges segment, participants will hear a ten point plan for developing business success from Darrell Miller of Marks-Miller Post & Pole. He will share the trials, tribulations and payoffs of running a business in Montana and what has set the partnership apart from the competition over the past 30 years. Marks-Miller is owned and operated by Gary and Debbie Marks and Darrell and his wife Karen. Since its beginnings in 1976, both families have been actively involved in all daily operations.

Those attending will also get a peek into the world of vertical integration from Jim Wright, Vice-President of Manufacturing at Semitool. See the common threads of business pressure from the company’s unique perspective in a highly competitive global market. Semitool is one of Montana’s largest companies and world leader in design, manufacture and support of high-performance equipment for the semiconductor industry.

Captivating attention will also be the stories of success and failure with relatives in the family business as told by Brad Reid, CEO at Diversified Plastics. Picking up on the conference theme of “Extreme Makeover: It Starts with a Vision,” he will describe the very personal “re-envisioning” for his company after a catastrophic fire just over a year ago. Diversified specializes in engineered plastics; the business started in the family garage in 1976 and is now run by Reid and his wife Wendy.

Conference registration is $175 with several discount options, and pre-registration is required. For more information on the Compete Smart conference, go to the Montana Manufacturing Center website www.mtmanufacturingcenter.com/Events/index.com.
Closing the Gap

1970s Los Angeles smog revisited. Shortly, I had the privilege of accompanying Montana’s Cong-ressman, Denny Rehberg, on a trade mission to expand oppor-tunities for Montana companies and thereby help them grow. We spent three nights in Seoul, South Korea, and some of the top business leaders in Tianjin, China. Trekkies will un-derstand when I use the Spocko-nian understatement ‘interesting’. Both cities have populations in excess of 10 million. Tianjin, situated on a port, is China’s fourth largest city and heavily industrialized. The skyline is punctuated with cranes constructing high-rise buildings. China will host the 2008 Summer Olympics and some of the sports facilities will be in Tianjin, about 100 km (60 miles) from Beijing. The air quality was comparable to Los Angeles in the late 1960s and early 70s. Our eyes burned, and our throats became raw. How, we wondered, will athletes perform... and what will Olympic visitors’ reaction be? We were told officials plan to close down factories and restrict traffic for several months before the Games in an attempt to clean up the air.

To my biased eyes, the pollution was worse than that of 1970s Los Angeles smog revisited. The irony is that the United States faces a real danger of becoming a spec-tator in any global trade expansion if we do not embrace China as a trading partner. Addressing the slow growth of US exports to China, a recent National Council for Advanced Manufacturing article, “Manufacturers Alliance: MAP: Numerous Barriers Hinder Successful Pen-etration of Chinese Market by U.S. Firms,” noted the U.S. needs to pursue an “ag-gressive policy ... in order to avoid being left as a spectator.” Our export growth to China is not keeping pace with China’s economic growth rate. A huge opportunity is being missed.

The trade mission showed that South Korea’s economy is thriving, and they are a willing and capable trading part-ner. Montana’s manufacturing com-munity can not afford to ignore these behemoth markets. All of this begs the question: Why should we be concerned with export markets? Arnie Sherman, Director of the Montana World Trade Center at the University of Montana, put it very succinctly. “...because 96% of the world’s population does not live in the United States.” Most potential customers live elsewhere. Elsewhere is where the bulk of consumers are.

A recent issue of Manufacturing & Technology News shows, “Small- to mid-sized manufacturing companies are not taking advantage of burgeoning growth opportunities that exist in overseas markets.” Instead, more than half are relying on introduction of new products for growth (very expensive and high risk), and at the same time, nearly half said global competition has forced them to lower prices.

Does your company need to include ex-ports, or increase exports, in your growth strategy? Fortunately, there are resources available in Montana to help MMEC. The Montana Department of Commerce, the Montana World Trade Center, and US Commercial Services are all capable, ready and willing to assist. Want to learn more? Join us in October at Compete Smart in Helena for sessions in a Track called “Market Makeover: International Perspective” (see related article on page 2) and other concurrent tracks for business improve-ment. You won’t be sorry.

Steve Holland, MMEC Director

The Power in Connecting...Leads to Revenue Stream

Unused Ford F350 pickup bump-ers are no longer piling up at Inter-continental Track Bodies (ITB) near Conrad, Mont., thanks to some assistance from MMEC. ITB makes customer-ordered modifi-cations to F350s for use as special towing units for the military; part of the modifi-cation replaces the stock front bumper with a heavy duty custom build. The company expects hundreds to be replaced over the next few years, but a request to the supplier not to include them on future orders could not be accommo-dated. The pile was growing.

At the end of June visit ITB, Daniels heard that the company was consider-ing getting registered with an Internet UPAT-AMSL service to sell the bumpers direct to interested buyers. Within a week of getting the call to help make it happen, UTAP Engineer and graduate student Clint Flnayson had found several promising companies for ITB to consider. A mid-July walk through of the ITB pro-duction area revealed that the stockpile of bumpers was gone.

ITB’s General Manager Rob Cook said that the accumulation had been purchased by one of the companies from the UTAP findings, a company that sells parts with the bumpers. It had taken all of the accumulation and future bumpers, as well. Not only has floor space been reclaimed, waste is being “recycled” back into the market-place and a revenue stream established for the company.

MMEC is First WIRED Grant Recipient

The first grant for Montana’s New Homestead Act (WIRED) funds has been awarded to the Montana Manufac-turing Extension Center (MMEC) ac-cording to an announcement by Governor Brian Schweitzer along with The Depart-ment of Labor and Industry. The Depart-ment of Commerce, The Governor’s Office of Economic Development and the Department of Agriculture. MMEC is the first in a series of grant recipients that will help develop the bio-products industry and create related new jobs for workforce in 32 counties across Montana. MMEC will receive $699,334 over three years to work with companies in those counties in an effort to build up and support manufacturing involving bio-products.

“MMEC has a proven track record of providing training in advanced manu-facturing for Montana’s businesses,” said Governor Brian Schweitzer. “The award will be used to diversify and increase the economic base in the WIRED region by developing and delivering client-driven training to improve skills, productivity and wages of new and incumbent workers.”

MMEC has begun steps to identify manufacturing firms that fit the poten-tial cluster in the region and the kinds of training that will support their efforts. The Center has also initiated the hiring process for an additional field resource. “This is a real example of cultivat-ing the manufacturing sector we call ‘value-added agriculture,’” commented MMEC Director Steve Holland. “The WIRED program has helped us to grow these innovative clusters and a more robust economy for Montana.”

The Power in Connecting...Leads to Revenue Stream

Finding a buyer frees up floor space

Since 1986, UTAP engineering graduate students have made engineering, technology, and research assistance available to manufacturers across Mont-ana while they attend coursework in the College of Engineering at MSU. The graduate research as-sistance, and EDA University, is currently under the supervision of UTAP Field Engineer Mark Shyne. Its graduate students have provided supplier and material research to many companies. In the second year of a partnership with the Montana World Trade Center at the University of Montana, UTAP has expanded to include marketing and stra-tegic business development assistance.
AS9100 Quality Systems...Boeing Partners with MEPS to Assist Suppliers

By Debrah Neal, MMEC

Sound quality management plays a key role in the competitive edge of the U.S. primes and their tier suppliers and beyond. A strategic initiative to maintain that edge is under way at Boeing Company. And the NIST Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) has been enlisted to help standardize quality systems among Boeing suppliers across the U.S. and into Montana.

In January of this year, 438 Boeing suppliers received a letter from company executives stating that they must be AS9100 certified by June of 2007 to continue as an aerospace-accredited Industry Controlled Other Party (ICOP) registrar. AS/EN9100 is the aerospace industry’s quality system standard designed to assure quality in design and development, as well as production.

The Boeing mandate is expected to trigger other industry leaders toward the development, as well as production.

As a supplement to the international Quality Management System standard ISO 9001, AS/EN9100 is recognized worldwide. It addresses specific aerospace space requirements for both civil and military aviation and aerospace needs. The effort by Boeing is to “align our quality management system flow-down with the international aerospace industry.” It is intended to address and eliminate redundant audits faced by some suppliers and beef up systems for others, according to the Boeing Web site. Its January communication acknowledged that some suppliers have obtained certification to AS/EN9100 on their own initiative and said it both appreciates and will recognize those certifications.

Summit Aerocoustics Group in Helena is one of the Boeing suppliers that received its Certificate of Registration in December 2005 from NQA, USA. One of the sources that used the readiness audit review was MMEC. Through a Montana Aerospace Development Association grant, Summit was able to contract with the Montana Manufacturing Extension Center for a readiness assessment prior to undergoing its I COP audit.

MEP engineers have performed similar readiness assessments and many of Montana’s suppliers and companies that need assistance with understanding, implementing or transitioning their quality system to the standard.

Boeing mandate on AS9100 to address and eliminate redundant audits faced by some suppliers and beef up systems for others

In order to reach out to suppliers and help them prepare for the critical certification, Boeing partnered with the MEP in April to offer assistance to companies as they prepare to certify to MEPC. Boeing also contracted the Montana Manufacturing Extension Center (MMEC) are a ready resource for companies that need assistance with understanding, implementing or transitioning their quality system to the standard.

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Semitool Gets ISO 14001 Thumbs Up!

by Deborah Naish, MMEC

SEMITOOL, one of Montana’s premier manufacturing companies, headquartered in Kalispell, strives to be an exemplary environmental citizen. The company received a significant environmental thumbs-up in July during the first ISO 14001 surveillance audit of its environmental management system (EMS). Formal certification to the worldwide environmental quality standard was attained in February.

“Passing the six-month surveillance audit is a real measure of success, often more challenging than the original audit,” according to Kreg Worrest, MMEC field engineer who specializes in quality standards and has worked on several quality projects at Semitool, Inc. “Auditors are looking for indications of continuing improvements during surveillance,” he added, “and that’s what they saw.”

Located just 30 miles from Glacier Park, one of America’s most pristine national parks, Semitool is a world leader in the design, development, manufacture, and support of high performance processing systems used in fabricating semiconductor devices. The company maintains sales and support centers in the United States, Europe and Asia. Its EMS has been in place since 1998.

“Semitool has always maintained a high environmental standard. Certification to ISO 14001 is an opportunity to demonstrate our continued commitment to the local and global community,” said Larry Murphy, President & COO.

“There should never be a concern about environmental activities at Semitool. Due to continued surveillance of environmental activities and a hard working staff, we continue to maintain a high standard. We are serious about our commitment” Tim Dutter, Semitool EHS Coordinator, added.

Growing Interest

“I believe certification is a positive. Many countries view ISO certification as a necessity. As such it may impact global sales which has a positive impact locally as well,” Dutter stated.

He cited a growing international trend of compliance to the standard as of January 2006 when Japan had 20,000 ISO 14000 certifications (4th of its companies). China 12,000, the U.S. weighing in sixth with 5,100.

Value of Certification

ISO 14001 provides a framework to effectively manage environmental affairs and integrate environmental values into operational processes, and attaining certification was put into Semitool’s long range planning some time ago.

“We pushed it right behind attaining our ISO 9000 certification. I felt pretty comfortable that we could do it, knowing there’s a learning curve as we started on the path,” Dave Jolly, Facilities Manager at Semitool said. “The ISO process is very dynamic. It’s also a perfect way to grab important disciplines and demonstrate to ourselves and others that we can do this.”

The auditable process provides momentum and helps a company continue to reduce waste as well as costs and inefficiencies. “While required surveillance audits can be stressful, valuable suggestions for future improvement come from them,” said Dutter.

Dutter is very pleased with the recent audit outcome. “David Boston from Underwriters Laboratories performed a day and a half audit, and it came out very well. We passed with only two minor nonconformities. I thought it would be more difficult due to changes in auditors. Dave did not conduct the registration audit and wasn’t as familiar with our system. But in reality, he was very true to the standard and did a very good job.”

“We work very, very hard to make sure Semitool is totally compliant with water quality and air quality from a variety of aspects,” he said. “We bear the costs and do monitoring because we want to know what’s going on and where any problems could arise.” Monitoring can cover runoff from its parking lots which are adjacent to agricultural land. The initiative affects even shipping and receiving.

 Anything that profiles as a hazardous waste is described for content, labeled, transported, and manifested properly.

“ We have a good emergency response team capable of responding to minor or major incidents in the off chance a problem occurs.” Dutter said. Public perception is important and part of that is letting people know that we do things right; ISO 14001 is part of that process.”

Positive Results

ISO certification is a great tool, according to Jolly. It helps build a case for being a responsible citizen when proposing new processes or locations. It demonstrates responsibility toward the environment to regulatory agencies such as the Montana Department of Environmental Quality and others. The company recently moved some of its manufacturing processes to a former Costco property in Kalispell. Semitool is seeing positive results from its updated EMS.

“I’m pretty jazzed,” said Jolly. “We have good people involved; they’ve been extremely supportive and have actually been ‘driving the bus’ on the initiative at this point.”

“We have been able to help our employee base become more aware of what environmental issues are out there and that we have a responsibility; it helps us be similar in the way we think about the environment,” Dutter noted.

The company has further reduced solid waste into the landfill. “While we have always had aluminum cans and paper recycling, now we take a closer look at lesser volume things we generate such as magazines and plastic bottles. Containers have been set up to capture those, and the company has re-captured thousands of dollars in recycling, not only cans and bottles but metal scrap from the manufacturing process as well.”

Jolly said the company recycles all consumable remnant including plastics and Teflon. “Making a great value to recycle, particularly Teflon. We see a return quarterly to semi-annually on it.”

He also noted that returns on recycled aluminum cans and bottles helped to create an employee emergency fund to help with hardship incidents.

At this time, Dutter is actively profiling the solid waste stream to the landfill to see “what is in there” – a continuing part of the measuring and monitoring effort. Energy conservation efforts are focusing on electrical use from lighting and computers to equipment that is high voltage. And other natural resource uses such as fossil fuels and employee transportation will be evaluated in the future.

Recent WEEE & RoHS regulations are not impacting Semitool directly. The regulations are often referred to as “lead-free manufacturing” where replacements for lead and other heavy metals are underway in consumer electronics. But Dutter said he occasionally performs studies to provide information to interested customers about the chemical components used in their products.

MMEC Expertise Enlisted

MMEC assisted the company with an ISO 14001 readiness assessment prior to its February certification. Dutter said. Most of the EMS documentation was written and a good plan was in place, but “Kreg Worrest at MMEC helped me cross the T’s and dot the I’s. The biggest help was with understanding the auditing process and work on the pre-assessment. Kreg’s presence was a positive motivator toward work on updating to the revised 2004 standard.”

“ He is an expert with quality systems; knows them inside out. I found him very responsive; he worked kinks out and responded to action items to help get the job done.”

“Tim was the man. This would not have happened without his personal commitment and teamwork approach,” Worrest proclaimed.

The project included mass training sessions for staff, and Worrest conducted a management review to explain the audit structure and value of certification to help build management buy-in.

Semitool posts its environmental policy on its website www.semitool.com.

“Reductions of waste and minimization of environmental risk may be accomplished in several different ways including but not limited to avoidance (e.g. material substitutions), mitigation (e.g. treatment) or reduction (e.g. recycling, efficiency improvements).”

“SEMITOOL stock trades on the NASDAQ National Market under the symbol SMTL.”
Discover what’s behind the acronyms and some of the faces from the lending community. Learn how to effectively mix and match loan packages.

Where’s the $$ for Your Makeover

One of the biggest obstacles for any business makeover is finding necessary capital. Whether it be for new equipment, facility improvements, workforce training or other expansion, where do you turn for financial assistance or to leverage the capital you have?

- Compete Smart, Your Manufacturing Makeover
  - Where the Dollars*
  - A breakout session that will explore some of the significant financing resources available from state, federal, and local institutions.

  *This session will help you discover what’s behind the acronyms and some of the faces from the lending community*, notes session moderator Linda Kin.

Most commonly cited benefits:

- Procedures for monitoring and measuring operations that can have a significant impact on the environment.
- Procedures for emergency response.
- Management of what is and is not possible in the workplace.
- Document and operational control procedures.
- Process for communication of the EMS to employees, on-site service providers & customers.
- Improved ability to meet compliance with environmental regulations.
- Increased perception of the key environmental issues by employees and a better (greener) public image of the organization.
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- Setting environmental goals, objectives, and targets that support the policy.
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Manufacturing News

Biz Opportunity

MSU-Bozeman’s College of Business is seeking local and regional businesses willing to offer MSU management students practical business experience during the upcoming fall and spring semesters in return for research, issue analysis or operational advice. The students will be enrolled in “Management 475 Management Practicum,” a senior-level class. Businesses interested in working with the Management 475 teams may contact Gary Bishop at (406) 994-4301 or e-mail gbishop@montana.edu. A full article is available on the Web at: http://www.montana.edu/cpa/news/.../article=3883

Unique Open House

PrintingForLess.com blazoned a celebration of successful economic development in Southwest Montana into the Grand Opening of its new Livingston, MT, facility in June. Featured events included a flag raising ceremony by the American Legion, a leadership development presentation addressing the challenge of growing capable leaders within a company, panel discussions, networking time, lunch and guided tours of the state-of-the-art facility.

Boeing Contract Awarded to GF Company

Cable Technology, Inc., Great Falls (www.cabletech.com), has been awarded a contract to help Boeing build a new P-8A multi-mission maritime aircraft for the Navy. U.S. Sen. Conrad Burns announced Monday in a Great Falls Tribune article, Cable Tech will provide electrical and coaxial assemblies for the first three P-8A aircraft, with follow-on contracts expected.

What Montana Expands Operation

A new Wheat Montana Bakery and Restaurant has opened in the state; the second, Great Falls (406-522-8526), a dozen federal SBIR/STTR program managers will participate. For more information visit www.wheatmontana.com. For information contact Ron Osterby by Big Sky Western Bank, is set for Sept. 21-22 at the Bozeman Holiday Inn. Call Ron Osterby (406) 994-4301 or e-mail gbishop@montana.edu. A full article is available on the Web at: http://www.montana.edu/cpa/news/.../article=3883

Unforeseen Quality Issues Costly

Dell’s mid-August recall of 4 million laptop batteries made by Sony may cost the companies as much as $400 million, according to a Seattle Times news release giving analyst predictions on the situation. The recall is said to be the largest ever in the consumer-electronics industry.

What’s in Your Niche?

From experience in manufacturing, she says from experience in manufacturing, she has observed that production workers are often too embarrassed to ask for more detail or feel intimidated by management — “These things create a fractured team and directly hit the pocketbook,” she added. “Small delays equal big delays when work instructions are not clear.”

ForwardFocus is a Newsletter for Montana Manufacturers Published Quarterly

Send News Briefs for the MFG News

Feel free to contact MMCE about manufacturing topics or issues that concern you and send your company news briefs to danash@coe.montana.edu

Call MMCE 406-994-3812 or 1-800-MEP-4MFG

Learn When a Picture Worth a Thousand Words

Get the muddle out of your manual Reduce scrap and rework and improve quality

Cut training time for new employees, and diminish delays that impact your customers when you attend “How to Write for High Value” during the Compete Smart Manufacturing Conference this fall Instructor Debbie Johnson will detail tips during this Wednesday afternoon session for writing for the correct audience with clarity and using appropriate visual aids. Johnson is Document Control/ISO Coordinator at S&K Electronics in Ronan and has worked for Joe Corporation and Hewlett Packard. She holds a master of science in technical communication from UM Montana Tech and has taught courses in technical writing.

“Engineers and management level employees are often the writers of work instructions, and in many cases they are not presented for the right audience or at an appropriate level for education level, experience and learning styles,” she said From experience in manufacturing, she has observed that production workers are often too embarrassed to ask for more detail or feel intimidated by management — “These things create a fractured team and directly hit the pocketbook,” she added “Small delays equal big delays when work instructions are not clear.”

Learn to cut waste from your work instructions, improve user productivity, and save time — value- added time from a master at clear communication. Johnson invites you to bring along both good and poor instruction examples or a project you need assistance clarifying for a hands-on lesson in writing “right.”

Brewing Facility Tour Scheduled during Compete Smart

The most sought after tickets in town will be the Compete Smart “eXtreme Taste Tour & Cookout” for conference goers on Wednesday evening, Oct. 4 in the parking lot adjacent to the Lewis & Clark Brewing Company and Brewhouse. Hosts for the evening will be NorthWest Energy and the Montana Manufacturing Center, conference organizer.

Dinner will include tours of the state-of-the-art brewing company while conference participants enjoy a special cookout prepared by the distinctive Brewhouse. The manufacturing facility tour will wind through the fermentation vessels, past grain and bottle storage and on to the mash tun and brew kettle as the complex process is explained by owner Max Pigman or brewmaster Sam Blessing.

The great explorers. Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, inspired the locally owned brewery name and in many ways its brewing style, where pride and craftsmanship are at their best. Tours will move through the tasting tap room designed in a “mash-shift” motif, where more adventurous microbrew aficionados can try select taste samples. Plant tours are an increasingly popular event at Compete Smart, which is put together by MMCE every other year specifically for manufacturers to run with peers and allies away from day-to-day distractions.

Other tour options during the conference will include a special October tour visit to the UM College of Technology airport campus shops and a selection of nearby manufacturers (Sunroom Aero-

Human Resource Tips Offered

Important human resource topics will be offered in breakout sessions at Compete Smart this fall. Bring your team to attend all five: On day one “First Break All the Rules” with Mike Wier, NorthWinds Publishing, will offer managerial makeovers tools and tips workers can use to become solid management material from one of the best books on “managing people ever.”

Participants can jump into “Extrme Problem Solving: Team-Based Solutions,” a session with a new twist, back by popular demand. Instructors are Kreg Worrest, MMCE, and Paul Hutter, Associated Employers.

Day two will feature guerilla tactics for hiring the best people in “The New Art of Hiring Smart” with Steve and Vicky Wilson, Willow Creek Consultants. Learn about common pitfalls and mistakes in the hiring and handing of employees.

And for more about valuable recruitment and retention tools through health plan offerings, attend “eXtreme Recruitment/Retention: Health Plans/Cost Containment” with moderater Judi Kimmell. This panel will share options and what’s working for Montana businesses.
October 4th & 5th, 2006
Great Northern Hotel
Helena, MT
Co-hosts:

www.mtmanufacturingcenter.com
406-994-3812

COME RUN with your MANUFACTURING PEERS and ALLIES

YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO IT ALONE

REGISTER ONLINE

October 4th & 5th, 2006
Great Northern Hotel
Helena, MT

Co-hosts:

www.mtmanufacturingcenter.com
406-994-3812

REGISTRATION & more

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To Help Manufacturers To Be More Successful

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Call 406-994-3812

We Can Help!