PCB Piezotronics Reports $1.8 Million in Value from NC State Projects
By Kimberly Conley

PCB Piezotronics, an upstate New York company, connected with the North Carolina State University Industrial Extension Service (IES) shortly after locating in Halifax, NC. They wanted to be lean. Lean is a continuous improvement tool that eliminates waste, be it in movement, materials or inventory/work in process.

The company experienced remarkable success through a series of lean projects and recently reported an economic value of $1.8 million based on those improvements. The majority of the value was based on increased sales and cost savings. Through lean they were able to retain jobs and even create 10 additional positions in the Halifax plant.


Lean projects facilitated by NC State IES, such as 5S (Shine, Sort, Standardize, Straighten and Sustain) have PCB employees all smiles.

Adopting a lean culture is one of the hardest and the most important shifts on the continuous improvement journey. Jim Kurian, lean extension specialist for IES lives and breathes lean every day. “Seeing the shift from resistance to acceptance [of lean] is a powerful thing. Participants see quickly that rather than working harder, they can get better results by working smarter,” said Kurian.

The lean work that Kurian facilitated introduced the company to one-piece flow, a concept that is based on using a pull-system. A pull-system produces only what the client requests, reducing work-in-process or inventory which inefficiently uses valuable space and energy to track. In PCB’s case one-piece flow reduced overtime and inventory and increased sales potential.

Upon a return visit to the facility, it is obvious that the employees revere Kurian. PCB lean leader, David Pericak apologized while numerous employees greeted Kurian with handshakes and in some cases, hugs. “Jim is a bit of an icon around here,” said Pericak.

Recognition

That $1.8 million value reported by PCB will be celebrated in NC State’s 1B4NC campaign. PCB will be recognized as a major contributor to the **IES promise: to create $1 billion in economic impact for North Carolina by 2010**. Since January 2006, IES’ economic impact for the state of NC is more than $417 million.

PCB’s lean journey was commendable, but it was one of many that this company has undertaken in the last 24 months.

Until 2004, PCB Piezotronics' sole location was Buffalo, New York, and they wanted to keep it that way. The company wanted to expand, and a site directly across the street seemed like a logical option.

Little did they realize North Carolina was vying for the expansion as well.

PCB Piezotronics manufactures piezoelectric quartz sensors, for the measurement of dynamic pressure, force, vibration and impact. This instrumentation is used for test, measurement, monitoring and feedback control in the automotive, aerospace, industrial, military and commercial capacities. PCB was just the type of company northeastern North Carolina sought.

Recruited

PCB Piezotronics brought over 100 jobs to Halifax with the expansion.

Vann Rogerson, president and chief executive officer of the North Carolina Northeast Commission, formerly an industrial recruiter for the North Carolina Department of Commerce, sought out PCB at an automotive testing show in Detroit.

Rogerson was recruiting automotive industries, particularly in the automotive testing sector with the goal of positioning northeastern North Carolina as a world-class region for automotive testing research and development. The assumption was that that research and development would ultimately lead to manufacturing facilities, jobs and increased economic activity.

Shortly after the tradeshow, the Northeast Commission called to follow-up and learned that the company wanted to learn more about northeastern North Carolina. The region collectively worked to provide the right incentive package and PCB chose the location 650 miles from their headquarters.

The expansion journey may have ended, but the road of continuous improvement is one on which PCB plans to forge ahead.