

Developments

Helping Employers Retain & Create Quality Jobs Rockford, Illinois USA

Welcome to the first issue of *Developments*. In this and future issues, you'll learn what the Rockford Area Economic Development Council is doing to help retain and recruit employers to grow quality jobs – the successes and the challenges. Community leaders like you know that a prosperous community needs a strong and diverse business climate.

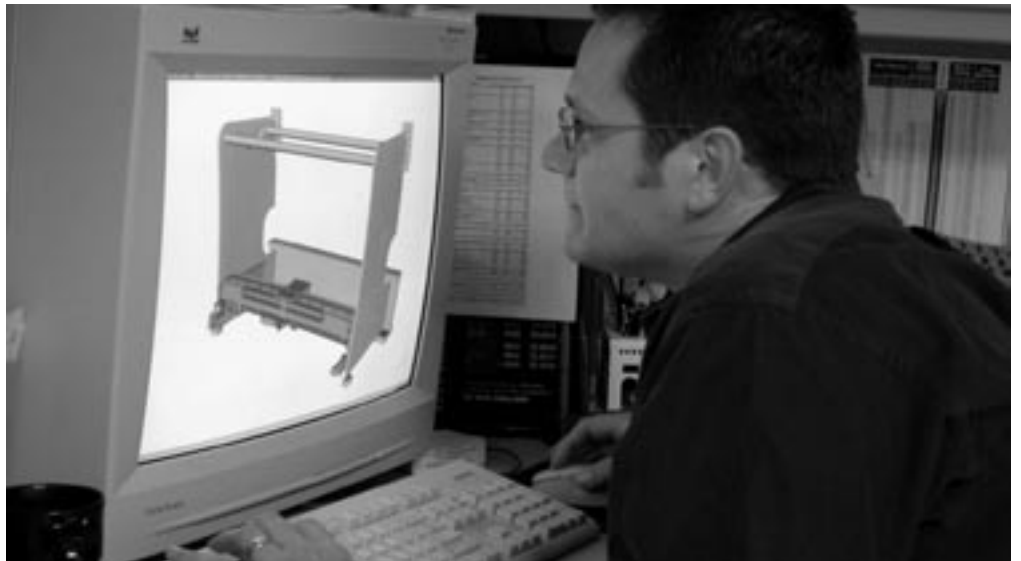
If your company needs assistance in retaining or attracting quality jobs, or know of one that does, **call the RAEDC at 815.987.8118 or e-mail info@rockford.il.com**. The RAEDC offers assistance in site selection, incentive support, demographic research, training and more.

Speedy Teamwork Keeps W.A. Whitney's 82 Jobs in Rockford

The extraordinary efforts of four economic development entities persuaded Mega Fabrication Inc. of Kansas to keep its August 2004 acquisition, W.A. Whitney, in Rockford where it will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2007.

Dave Barber, chief executive officer of W.A. Whitney, credits the City of Rockford, Rockford Local Development Corporation, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and the **Rockford Area Economic Development Council** for its positive support. "It got done in less than four months. A loan guarantee program helped tip the scales," he said.

What's next? Whitney is busy designing a new CNC precision press brake with their new sister company, Piranha. The new product is engineered in Rockford



Peter Bates, engineering group leader at W.A. Whitney, designs a 12-ft. long CNC precision press brake. Forty machines will be assembled in Rockford this year alone.

and all final assembly will be performed here. Whitney expects to make 40 in the first year alone. The 12 ft.-long machines will exert 200 tons of pressure as it forms metal plates.

Barber extends an invitation to RAEDC members to attend an open house on April 20 & 21 to see the new press brake.

Also scheduled for viewing will be two new 7,000 watt laser machines.

More Jobs Expected. In addition to retaining 82 skilled jobs, Whitney plans to add 30 new jobs during the next decade as it begins its second 100 years in Rockford.

The Rockford Area Economic Development Council is a public-private partnership dedicated to business attraction, retention and expansion for Winnebago, Boone and Ogle Counties of Illinois.

Mission: To retain and recruit employers to grow quality jobs.

Goal: Help add 5,000 new jobs by 2007 through job retention, expansion and trade development; new business recruitment; and improved business climate services.

Abundant Space and Skilled Workforce Draws Two Businesses to Rockford

Plastics Company Hopes to Grow to Support 40 Jobs

Paul Myers, owner of Custom Compounding Services LLC, a company that makes custom plastic pellets for injection molding, found it very easy to locate his new company in Rockford. "There's an abundance of buildings here that are well built, with amenities that newer buildings don't have, like cranes and high ceilings. We're fortunate to have a building that allows the railroad to spot five rail cars into the building, out of the weather. This is perfect because our materials can remain free of contamination from the elements," explained Myers.

"With a startup business like mine, workforce-wise you need a little of everything - management, quality assurance, maintenance, etc. People are willing to work here. We have 6 employees now. We hope to have 20 next year and 40 the year after that," he said.

Myers took early retirement from another polymer compounding firm in Carpentersville and started Custom Compounding in Rockford in October of 2004. His 70,000 square-foot facility is located at 840 Airport Drive.



New employer Paul Myers by a four-step extrusion compounding line. He found the perfect location for his plastics company in the former National Lock building by the airport.

Fastener Manufacturer Brought 90 Jobs

Another custom manufacturer, Slidematic, a fastener engineering and manufacturing company, outgrew its Chicagoland facility and moved to a former Textron property in southwest Rockford in July.

"The real estate in Rockford is excellently priced and we have access to a workforce that is much more conducive to our industry than where we were before," stated Randy Baker of Slidematic.

Slidematic added 25 new jobs when they moved to Rockford so they now employ 90 people. Their fasteners and stampings are used in automotive applications as well as many other uses.

Myers and Baker were impressed with the cooperation they received from economic development groups in Rockford. Both cited Elmo Dowd, City of Rockford economic development director; Bob Levin, RAEDC president; and John Phelps, Rockford Local Development

Corporation executive director, as being very helpful in facilitating their efforts.

"I've found Rockford to be a very friendly town. It tries real hard to accommodate new business. The RAEDC helped steer me through obstacles, finding a building, getting a lease. My wife and I will be moving to Rockford in the next six months," promised Myers.

Affordable Training

Welding Company Benefits from Continuous Improvement Class

"The timing was perfect. After just two classes of the eight Continuous Improvement Series, we could make an immediate impact on a job we had just started. We applied what we learned and exceeded our bid estimates by more than three times," reported Thom Shelow, president of Superior Joining Technologies, Inc. in Machesney Park.

Thom and his wife Teresa, owners of a precision welding company in Machesney Park, are among the 37 top-level managers from small manufacturing companies with fewer than 75 employees who are taking advantage of a nationally recognized Continuous Improvement Series designed specifically for area small businesses.

The unique, affordable series is made possible through the collaboration of the Abilities Center, Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Illinois Manufacturing Extension Center (IMEC), Northern Illinois University, **Rockford Area Economic Development Council** and Rock Valley College. The series will help small manufacturing companies be globally competitive.



Teresa and Thom Shelow of Superior Joining said of the Continuous Improvement Series presented by the Council and its partners, "Large corporations can have in-house seminars, but training is not that accessible for small businesses. This is a great gift, hands-on training in a group setting with other small businesses. We appreciate it very much," said Thom.

815.987.8118, e-mail info@rockfordill.com or visit www.rockfordill.com.
For more information on RAEDC programs or services, please call

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