



An ATAC Client Success Story



AUBURN

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

Union Foundry Company, a division of McWane Inc., has been a manufacturing mainstay in Anniston, Ala. since 1912. Boasting annual sales of about \$75 million, Union Foundry is among the leading manufacturers of cast pipe fittings and accessory components.

In 2007, the company began working with Auburn Technical Assistance Center – the ATN Center at Auburn University – applying Lean Continuous Improvement (CI) to its operations. To date, Union Foundry has spread CI into multiple areas of its operations through the application of Lean training and Rapid Improvement Events in the manufacturing process. Additionally, ATAC has provided company leaders with strategy planning and CI initiative coaching assistance.



Company applying, spreading CI systematically

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processes has definitely made us more competitive,” said Plant Manager Bryan Biehunko.

The company credits ATAC with helping it to retain some \$1 million in sales that it might otherwise have lost and about that same amount in cost savings by improving its processes.

“We have facilitated Rapid Improvement Events in five different manufacturing processes,” said ATAC Lean Specialist David Hicks.

Hicks aided by other ATAC Lean specialists, has been the primary facilitator in CI work with Union Foundry.

A Rapid Improvement Event, or Kaizen, is taking the lessons learned through Lean training and implementing them into rapid and meaningful improvements in the actual operation. Rapid Improvement Events are conducted onsite at the company’s manufacturing or business operations facility as three- or five-day facilitation sessions. During this process, ATAC trainers impart the knowledge and skill base to make immediate improvements

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and to enable the organization to continue and sustain those improvements.

Union Foundry personnel have been trained in ATAC’s five-day Lean Certificate Series, which prepares an organization’s Lean leaders to direct CI in their organizations; in ATAC’s Accounting for a Lean Enterprise course, which shows Lean companies how to tie accounting to the product Value Stream; and in the various tools of CI.

“We have conducted Rapid Improvement Events in our component blasting and cleaning area, our mold casting area, machining area, cement lining process, and in the core box rigging area,” Biehunko said. “The events have significantly reduced set-up and travel time, in some cases by more than half. We have applied 5s (sort, set in order, shine, standardize and sustain) to areas and the result there is better organization as well as improved work flow and efficiency. And in other areas, we have improved product throughput by as much as 50 percent and production volume by nearly 80 percent.”

Impact Summary

Union Foundry officials say that ATAC assistance has been a significant factor in enabling the manufacturer to remain competitive in a fierce global market. The company credits ATAC with helping it to retain some \$1 million in sales that it might otherwise have lost and about that same amount in cost savings by improving its processes. Following is a summary of additional production impacts by manufacturing area:

Component Blast Cleaning: Shot blasts to clean components

- Reducing product flow constraints

Mold Casting: Set-up and changeover of pipe fitting production patterns

- Achieved better material storage and organization
- Reduced travel distance for product handling by 50 percent
- Improved set-up time 50 percent
- Improved work order tracking

Core Box Rigging: Set up and tear down of core boxes for casting process

- Travel distance reduced from ¼ mile to 50 feet/trip
- Time per trip reduced from 15 minutes to 3 minutes
- Number trips reduced from 3 per setup to 1
- Number setups accomplished improved from 8/shift to 25/shift
- Value-added time spent per setup improved from 33.4 percent to 76.4 percent

Machining: Face, drill and thread fittings

- Improved tooling life from two pieces per insert to 9, saving some \$53,000 annually in tooling costs alone.
- Established operator standard work and maintenance process (TPM)
- Reduced batch production and improved product throughput by 50 percent

Cement Pipe Lining: Spray inside of pipe fitting with a cement liner to reduce deposit buildup

- Reorganized production area
- Increased production volume by nearly 80 percent

Auburn Technical Assistance Center was established in 1976 and is an affiliate of the Alabama Technology Network and an Economic Development Administration University Center. As an Outreach arm of the Auburn University College of Business, ATAC provides business and technical assistance, customized training, and consultation in implementing value-added strategies to manufacturers and other businesses, not-for-profit organizations and government agencies in Alabama and the Southeast. SOAR is an ATAC publication. Direct inquiries and questions to Mitch Emmons, Sr. Outreach Assoc., 334.844.3881, emmonmb@auburn.edu.

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