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TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

Wedge Manufacturing began operations about 10 years ago as an in-house machining department of Integrated Medical Systems (IMS) in Birmingham, Ala. When Wedge became its own entity about one year ago, management recognized the need to enhance business capacity, and to do so, knew that it had to embrace the Lean philosophy of continuous improvement. Since beginning its Lean journey with Auburn Technical Assistance Center last fall, Wedge has more than doubled its production capacity, reduced overhead and is adding more jobs.



Lean helps machining firm to add capacity and jobs

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“IMS is a leading surgical instruments manufacturing company,” said Wedge Manufacturing General Manager Brian Jones. “We (Wedge) had always provided precision machining and QC inspection for IMS as our customer. However, once we became a stand-alone business, we needed the ability to compete for new customers and to deliver a high quality product in a timely manner.”

Jones already was familiar with the Lean training and assistance provided to Alabama manufacturers through the Auburn Technical Assistance Center (ATAC) and its affiliate the Alabama Technology Network (ATN).



Jones contacted ATAC’s Lean Team Leader Hank Czarnecki, who along with his colleague David Hicks, has facilitated a Lean training and implementation program that has enabled Wedge Manufacturing to reduce operating shifts from two to one, and expand production capacity to enable the company to compete for some \$1.2 million in new sales and add additional jobs.

“In the short time since embracing Lean back in the fall, we have more than doubled our production efficiency,” Jones said. “We were

confident in our capabilities and now with this efficiency improvement, Wedge is in a position to accept jobs from newly acquired customers and seek new customers.”

In addition to efficiency and sales enhancements, Jones says this Lean transformation is credited also with enabling the company to save more than \$75,000 in overhead and energy costs. He says the firm also has invested \$2,500 in new plant equipment, and saved some \$125,000 in unnecessary equipment investments.

“We were planning to purchase additional machining equipment to handle the new business,” Jones said. “After implementing Lean, we found that we could handle the increase without the added equipment.”

Wedge is implementing Lean in the primary area of downtime reduction, according to Jones.

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-- Brian Jones, Wedge Manufacturing



Machine Shop Manager Brent Bowden shows the “fifo” lane implemented to ensure that parts are processed on a first-in-first-out basis to help ensure efficiency and timely delivery.

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“We have worked to develop and improve our product value stream. We are analyzing the causes of downtime and scrap and making true fixes in the process. Our engineering department works closely with our customers to ensure that the prints provided are accurate and the resulting machined part will meet their needs. This cooperation ensures that rework is avoided.”

Wedge Manufacturing presently employs nine machinists in its small shop. The company will be adding seven more in the near future to keep up with production demands, Jones said.

“I am extremely pleased with the outcome thus far in our relationship with ATAC and the ATN,” Jones said. “Lean definitely is making us more competitive.”



Wedge Manufacturing produces an array of high-end machined parts for surgical and other medical applications in diverse sizes and complexity. Top right, General Manager Brian Jones shows the recently installed Accountability Board used to track production. The Accountability Board is one of the many Lean tools that can be used to ensure production is meeting customer demand timely and efficiently.



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.

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