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NH MEP HELPS BARON BECOME A LEAN MACHINE

Manufacturer Implements Lean Techniques and Creates a New, Efficient Plant Layout

LACONIA, NH – Laconia-based, family owned and operated Baron Machine Company, Inc. serves customers across the United States and beyond. For more than 50 years, the manufacturer has provided machining solutions to customers by offering CNC milling, turning, metal fabrication, welding, as well as production machining for aerospace.

Recently, Baron Machine's manufacturing manager Rich Combs was looking to put a new system in place in order to provide the best quality products to their customers as well as to create a highly-organized environment that would meet their needs on many levels. Over the last several years, the company has been working with the New Hampshire Manufacturing Extension Partnership (NH MEP) and project manager Christopher Tsakiris on defense related projects and events, and were very comfortable with his training style. When they were ready to make a change, they asked Chris for help.

"We were looking to evolve our company. I knew Lean manufacturing would be the way to go for us, having spent 18 years in the automotive industry. Lean has so many benefits and I knew it would help us transform Baron Machine for the better, so I couldn't wait to get started with the NH MEP," said Combs.

Chris and Baron Machine decided the main focus for their Lean training would be on 5s Kaizen work. 5s Kaizen events, taken from a Japanese term meaning "continuous slow improvement" involve cleaning and organizing the materials and machinery within an area by sorting, shining, and setting in order and then standardizing procedures for storage, use, maintenance and replenishment. Sustain is the last "s" in the 5s process.

"In particular, we addressed their Cutoff Room where material is received, stored and prepared. Because there was so much inventory stored there, it was difficult and time consuming to find materials that were needed, especially with no inventory process or system in place," said Tsakiris. "We knew it was imperative to get this space organized."

Twelve employees from all different areas of the company worked on the room in segments for more than five weeks. Using a spaghetti diagram, they mapped out they way workers and materials traveled in and through the space and then created a current state map that helped pinpoint the trouble areas. From this, they discovered it took an average of 15 minutes to locate materials in the Cutoff Room and the average employee was traveling about 1,394 feet per day while receiving materials.

"We set targets based on some universal goals, including developing an inventory control system and more visual controls to assist with picking materials, establishing designated areas for scrap

material and materials from customers, and making better use of floor space,” said Combs. “We also wanted to reduce raw material inventory by half, to gain at least 30-percent more floor space, and to be able to verify inventory and location of materials within a minute. We accomplished all this and more and couldn’t believe the great results.”

After this process, Baron Machine was able to reclaim 850 square feet of floor space, which was nearly double their original goal. They also removed and reclaimed 44 tons of obsolete and unusable material and now sell scrap metal to a recycling center. Every material has a place and an inventory protocol. Instead of employees traveling almost 1,400 feet per day, they only now travel 168 feet.

“The team came away from these activities with a 30-day to-do list. They also developed a sustainment plan which incorporates a display board where the standards are posted as a visual reminder. They are fully using everything they learned and are really following through with these processes,” added Tsakiris.

“These 5s events have been extremely productive. I’m very much looking forward to the next one! We have done a few Kaizens on our own and plan to do three or four more this year,” remarked Combs. “Approximately half of our 50 employees have participated in some Lean training so far and everyone is getting on the same page. We have had such great success with Lean events like the Time Wise® LE102 Basic Lean for Job Shops, and can’t thank the NH MEP enough for giving us such a good springboard.”

About NH MEP

The NH MEP is an affiliate of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) under the U.S. Department of Commerce. The national MEP system is a network of manufacturing extension centers that provide business and technical assistance to smaller manufacturers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Through MEP, manufacturers have access to more than 2,000 manufacturing and business “coaches” whose job is to help firms make changes that lead to greater productivity, increased profits and enhanced global competitiveness. For more information, please visit www.nhmep.org, or phone 1-800-MEP-4MFG.

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