

Trade center assists Ohio businesses hurt by imports

By Thomas Gnau

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The numbers are ugly: In the first seven months of 2007, more than 5,300 Ohio workers lost their jobs to international trade, the U.S. Labor Department said last week.

To hold their place in the trade arena, at least two local firms have looked north to Michigan, where the Great Lakes Trade Adjustment Assistance Center helped them focus on strengths.



CNC (computer numerical control) machinist Larry Daumann rough mills a mold component for an international client at Minco Tool & Mold Inc. PHOTO BY JAN UNDERWOOD/Dayton Daily News

"(The center) cares, and they bring something to the party," said Joe Kavalauskas, vice president of Dayton mold-maker Minco Group.

Kavalauskas worked with the center earlier this decade after customer Lexmark took its business — in this case, injection molding and assembly of laser printers — to China.

"We were devastated," Kavalauskas said.

He approached the center, and staff brought in consultants who helped Minco become more efficient and find new business.

Today, the company has about 100 employees, down from about 150 in the mid-1990s.

"We are tremendously more efficient or we would not be in business," Kavalauskas said.

Leaders of O'Neil & Associates Inc. knew there was trouble ahead when the Miamisburg technical writing firm's largest customer wanted lower prices.

"We think doing business in the United States is too expensive," O'Neil Vice President Thomas Milligan remembered the customer — whom he did not wish to name — telling him.

So it wasn't a surprise when the customer decided to place work offshore in 2003.

Numbers tell part of the story: In 2004, O'Neil's work force dropped 16 percent to 210

workers. Sales revenue in 2002 was \$19.9 million. In 2004, sales fell to just above \$18 million.

This year, the firm is on track to hit \$22 million in sales. It has 250 employees — 190 at its Byers Road office — and has hired more than 50 people since Jan. 1. Another 10 to 20 may be hired yet this year, Milligan said.

Milligan said the center helped O'Neil strengthen marketing, upgrade its trade show presence and Web site.

The center is the sole federal program meant to help small manufacturers who have been hurt by imports, said Scott Jacobs, the center's director.

American companies which have managed to survive the last two recessions probably have geographical advantages and engineering abilities even if they can't always be the lowest-cost suppliers, he said.

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TRADE HELP

To start: Visit www.gltaac.org

The help: The federal program pays up to 75 percent of the cost of developing an adjustment plan.

In Ohio: The center is working with 16 companies employing about 1,800 workers.

Source: GLTAAC

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