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Growing in Vandalia, with help from Michigan

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By [Thomas Gnau](#) - Staff Writer

Vandalia —

The workforce at Manufactured Assemblies Corp has grown from 46 to 123 local employees in three years.

Along the way, the company has had a little help.

The company is a contract manufacturer of cable assemblies and wiring harnesses for customers in health care, retail, the military, aerospace, hospitality and other industries. The products are often bundles of electronics and cables that connect networks or control electronic bulletin boards.



Brad Nimer is president of Manufactured Assemblies Corp. in Vandalia.
LISA POWELL / STAFF

The company was born in Troy and moved to Webster Street in Vandalia in 1991. Since 2008, it has been based in a large building in a former farm field off Fieldstone Way.

And MAC, as it's often called, is growing, having just added about 14,000 square feet to its manufacturing and warehouse facility. The site now covers nearly 50,000 square feet.

The company has grown its Atlanta facility, too; that facility is up to 116 employees.

“Our customers are doing well,” said Brad Nimer, MAC president. “We’re doing better. The industries we serve are doing well.”

Ken DiFranco, MAC regional business manager, pointed out electronic signs used by a U.S. military base in South Korea. The signs can alert people on base to chemical or other attacks. Those warning signs rely on MAC cables and electronics, but the company also builds the structure, even buying fabricated metal for the signs.

“These signs are positioned on base, and they’re controlled by one computer,” DiFranco said. “They give instructions on what to do, where to go, without having to talk.”

MAC’s journey hasn’t been easy. In 2008, MAC faced headwinds from cheap imports. It also faced plenty of domestic competition.

The Ann Arbor, Mich.-based Great Lakes Trade Adjustment Assistance Center pointed MAC to expert consultants in lean manufacturing, efficiency and how to beat imports from what Nimer calls “low-cost regions.”

The center also helped pay the cost of those consultants, thanks to U.S. Department of Commerce funding.

“We went out and got strategic planning help, lean manufacturing help,” Nimer said. “We actually have, right now, 23 green belts and two black belts in lean manufacturing.”

The colored belts represent levels of expertise. Ken Haupt, MAC corporate quality manager, has a black belt. Exploring the subject took 10 to 15 hours a week and was “intense,” he said.

“It’s a philosophy that’s been around since the ’70s in manufacturing,” Haupt said. When waste and inefficiencies are eliminated, companies become more competitive, he said.

Ruth Ann Church, a project manager with the trade center, said hiring consultants helps beleaguered companies tap into a fresh perspective.

“There is something about an outside view that can bring good information to the table,” she said.

Church estimated that over 30 years, the program has helped more than 350 companies in Ohio, Michigan and Indiana. There are 10 similar centers across the country, assisting companies in 47 other states.

“We have had quite a few (clients) in Dayton,” Church said.

Great Lakes Trade Adjustment Assistance Center

Institute for Research on Labor, Employment and the Economy ☐ University of Michigan

506 East Liberty Street, 2nd Floor ☐ Ann Arbor, MI 48104-2210

TEL: (877) 877-5439 ☐ FAX (734) 998-6224 ☐ gltaac@umich.edu

www.gltaac.org