



Article 331

February 2, 2014

ExporTech Class Helps Aztec Manufacturer Prepare for Global Market

By Karen Converse, New Mexico MEP

After 32 years as president of Jack's Plastic Welding, Jack Kloepher wanted to see if his company was ready to begin exporting three of its most promising products: stand-up inflatable paddle boards and pontoon boats for recreationists, and rapid deployable spill containment units for the oil and gas industry.

So Kloepher and partner Errol Baade enrolled in the ExporTech class offered by New Mexico Manufacturing Extension Partnership in collaboration with the New Mexico Economic Development Department and other partners.

At the end of the three-month course, the two reached the conclusion that going global was premature. Before the Aztec company can meet the global demands it hopes to generate, Kloepher said, the company needs to expand its shop space and build its domestic sales by 30 percent.

"We came to some realizations — that this was over our heads for now," he said. "We need to grow before we can get serious."

Jack's Plastic Welding has been around since 1982, creating welded and glued inflatable products made of coated fabrics. Its products are sold at home and in Denmark, Canada and the Caribbean, but Kloepher and his partners wanted a realistic appraisal of what the company would need to do to compete in the international arena.

Getting Schooled

It was natural for Kloepher to turn to an MEP program, as he was a graduate of several leadership and lean production classes offered by the statewide nonprofit. ExporTech aims to help aspiring exporters as well as companies already selling their products abroad.

The program is fashioned like many MEP offerings — with small group sessions facilitated by experts — and its objectives are much the same: to help companies become more competitive.



Participants learn the basics of international business — including legal, logistical and strategic challenges. In three full-day sessions, representatives from six to eight companies develop a simple plan to market their products outside the U.S. or to strengthen their outreach by increasing productivity and improving marketing.

Between sessions, export plans are developed with help from expert coaches. The final session includes a critique of those plans. Companies are then connected with public and private organizations that can help them reach the next stage that's appropriate for their business.

"Having experts who've been in the system was huge," Kloepher said. "They helped guide us. It's far better than going in blind."

Past participants in ExporTech generate export sales within three to six months of completing the course. The average participant has reported an increase in sales of \$170,000 and savings of \$34,000 — mostly in the labor time the company would have spent in research and networking.

ExporTech sessions — jointly conducted by the New Mexico MEP and its partners — are tentatively scheduled for March in Las Cruces. The course costs \$999 for up to three individuals per company, though early registrants can pay as little as \$710. Payment by credit card, postal order or check must be received by April 30.

For more information, visit www.newmexicomep.org or call 505-262-0921.

Finance New Mexico is a public service initiative to assist individuals and businesses with obtaining skills and funding resources for their business or idea. To learn more, go to www.FinanceNewMexico.org. Sponsored by:

