

New Mexico MEP Helps Wood-Floor Manufacturer Expand Business's Reach

By Ron Burke, Center Director, New Mexico Manufacturing Extension Partnership

When the 2000 Viveash Fire burned through 17 million board feet of timber on his family's homestead above Pecos, David Old drew on his experience as a sawmill owner-operator to make the best of overwhelming misfortune.

The company David Old built from the ashes of his family's fire-damaged forest is now a top-drawer manufacturer and global exporter of fine wood floors made from reclaimed wood harvested from private and public lands using environmentally sound forest-management standards.



Sheer grit and entrepreneurial flexibility helped Old and his family-owned enterprise transform crisis into opportunity. In recent years, the Las Vegas, N.M.-based venture welcomed technical and training assistance from the New Mexico Manufacturing Extension Partnership, a nonprofit organization that helps businesses learn lean concepts that can increase their profitability and competitiveness.

Education

Almost every year, Old Wood sends its core people to MEP-sponsored classes in lean manufacturing to help them internalize its core principles, which include maximizing efficiency and productivity while reducing waste.

Shiloh Old, David Old's son and the company's vice president of international operations, understands the importance of the principles, and he said the classes help company workers "to hear about it from someone other than the boss."

About half the company's work force of 18 to 25 full-time employees are laborers who help harvest pine and Douglas fir from forests damaged by wildfire and drought. The others – those who have received MEP training – are directly involved with the manufacturing process. They help design and produce the wide-plank, end-grain and architectural products for which the company is becoming internationally known.

Building Connections

Old Wood turned to MEP again when a major Kuwait client requested product certifications for each shipment of flooring it received from the company. The international inspection agency closest to Las Vegas was in Los Angeles, so the manufacturer referred the client to MEP, which was able to certify its shipments on behalf of an inspection agency based in Italy.

“We wouldn’t have been able to ship products” to the Middle East without this intervention, Old said.

Those types of networks and connections are proving fruitful as Old Wood expands its reach in the global market. MEP, for example, has helped Old Wood find international partners for various business ventures and is available whenever the company needs a document certified by a manufacturing control group, according to Old.

Because of its connections with manufacturers around the state, the organization has helped Old Wood find people with the expertise it needed to expand its product line to include custom furniture and interior architectural creations.

“It’s made it a lot easier,” Old said. “We would have had to find something to replace [MEP] if it didn’t exist.”

New Mexico MEP collaborates with other nonprofit and government organizations to provide services. Lean manufacturing classes are offered through a partnership with the New Mexico Small Business Assistance program, which pays the participation fees for businesses that qualify. For information about training and other services available from New Mexico MEP, visit the organization’s website at newmexicomep.org or call (505) 262-0921.

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