

Solar Company Doubles Productivity at Socorro Plant Using Lean Techniques

By Andrea Holling, New Mexico MEP

Dennis Grubb will tell you that partnering with the New Mexico Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) was one of the best business decisions he ever made — not counting the decision to move his solar products business, Solaro Energy, from California to New Mexico.

Within a year of building a production facility in a business park just outside Socorro, the solar industry veteran had doubled productivity at the plant where his company's solar powered attic fans and electronic skylights are assembled. He had outgrown his original space, requiring the construction of two more buildings.

Grubb, who designed and engineered every Solaro innovation, applauds the business-friendly environment in New Mexico and the training he and his work force obtained from MEP, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping businesses increase profitability and competitiveness by streamlining production to its most efficient essentials.

The collaboration began with a phone call from MEP at just the right time — when Grubb realized his company needed to purge the production process of bugs and bottlenecks. “We realized we needed to improve our efficiency” he said.

MEP uses multiple techniques to help businesses increase profits by standardizing production and administration and eliminating anything that wastes time or resources or doesn't add value to the final product. Solaro Energy sent every employee to MEP's classroom training sessions, and MEP visited the factory to help the company apply those lessons at the point of production.

“We reorganized the whole factory and got rid of practices that were obsolete or unnecessary,” Grubb said. “Our incidence of quality failure has dropped to almost zero.”

The company employs 20 people now, but Grubb expects to add jobs every year until his work force numbers 100 in five years. That's a real boost to the economy of Socorro.

“I'm not in this for the money but for the planet,” he said. Solaro's mission is to “become the



industry standard and worldwide source of solar-powered solutions for residential, commercial, manufacturing, and municipal environments.”

Grubb is sold on the idea that the lean manufacturing practices he’s learned from MEP will help him reach those ambitious goals. He plans to look for people with the same mind-set and commitment to lean manufacturing as the company grows and hires more employees. All new hires will undergo training with MEP.

“We want to China-proof our company — to do things more efficiently,” he said. “We’re able to produce more now with the same number of people. Better profits mean we can pay our people more.”

MEP is affiliated with the U.S. Commerce Department and exists to help small and mid-sized businesses create and preserve American jobs. Some services are offered at no charge, as most New Mexico businesses qualify for financial assistance to attend MEP’s training sessions or receive on-site help applying lean practices.

For more information about New Mexico MEP offerings, visit newmexicomep.org or call (505) 262-0921.

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