

## Entrepreneurial Orbit: Businesses at Heart of Resource Expo

By Holly Bradshaw-Eakes, Finance New Mexico

Once a business gets its foot inside the door with an economic development organization like the New Mexico Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP), its opportunities for growth expand dramatically.

Jack Kloepfer discovered this while navigating his Aztec, New Mexico, business beyond the line of outdoor recreation products he built from thermoplastic-coated fabrics and into products for energy and aerospace industries. The company's relationship with New Mexico MEP has led to others, including the New Mexico Small Business Assistance Program (NMSBA), the Small Business Development Center at San Juan College in Farmington and the New Mexico Economic Development Department, where Jack's Plastic Welding CEO Errol Baade hopes to find capital to expand production space.



Entrepreneurs can explore this resource universe at the New Mexico Innovation Expo on April 19 in Albuquerque. Hosted by the NMSBA program and New Mexico MEP, the event introduces inventors and innovators to New Mexico resources, including the NMSBA program and how it has helped businesses like Jack's Plastic Welding succeed.

Created by the state Legislature in 2000, NMSBA underwrites up to \$20,000 in technical assistance at no cost to small businesses outside Bernalillo County (and up to \$10,000 if they are in Bernalillo County). NMSBA partners with educational and government entities, including the University of New Mexico's engineering program and school of management and New Mexico State University's Arrowhead Center business accelerator. It connects business owners with national laboratory scientists who can help them overcome technical obstacles, and it collaborates with New Mexico MEP to provide quality and lean manufacturing training.

### Expanding Horizons

In 1980, Jack's Plastic started fabricating whitewater rafts, dry bags, and waterproof mattresses. It grew from that niche by using its rugged fabrics to build emergency spill containers and pipe plugs for the oil

and gas industry. Recent aerospace contracts have resulted in the company supplying collars for the SpaceX Falcon Heavy rocket that launched in February.

Kloepfer and Baade worked with New Mexico MEP through the NMSBA program to improve the company's training and administrative processes and broaden its product base, according to Denise Williams Monaghan, MEP's Northwest region innovation director. These services helped the company increase sales by \$70,000, retain a valuable customer base, create or retain 11 jobs, and save more than \$183,000, Monaghan said.

"Having MEP working with the crew to implement ideas that they already have, or just to get those ideas on the conscious level, is like bringing more brainpower into the system," Kloepfer said of the working relationship. "When we all think about how to make it better and we have the license to do that, things get better for everyone and it becomes a happier and more productive workplace."

## Resource Fair

The Innovation Expo features a resource fair where business owners can engage with resource providers and network with other small business; a Eureka Effect session where entrepreneurs can meet one-on-one (pre-arranged through event registration) with a Sandia or LANL scientist; a reception for networking; and a celebration of the 2017 NMSBA success story participants.

The event is 2 to 6 p.m. April 19, at Lobo Rainforest, 101 Broadway Blvd. N.E., Albuquerque. Register at: <https://nminnovationexpo.splashthat.com/>.

For more information about NMSBA, visit <http://www.nmsbaprogram.org/>. To learn about New Mexico MEP, visit <http://newmexicomep.org/>.

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