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Belfast business receives manufacturing award

By MidcoastBeacon

Janet Dutson
Belfast Area Chamber
of Commerce

A Belfast Area Chamber of Commerce member has been recognized for a well-deserved award that acknowledges years of manufacturing excellence. The Maine Manufacturing Extension Partnership has named Mathews Bros. the recipient of this year's Maine MEP Manufacturing Excellence Award. The award was presented to the 156-year-old window manufacturer in a ceremony at its plant in Belfast on June 15.

As we strive to encourage new business development in the region, we can sometimes overlook the contributions that long-time employers in the community make in setting industry standards. Rather than simply implement lean business practices, they trained two employees to lead their entire team in eliminating waste and enabling continual improvement. Instead of paying lip service to great customer service, they initiated the WOW! Customer Service program — a system designed to surpass customer expectation of great service.

The manufacturing industry, especially the construction-related trades, have been hard hit during these economic times, yet Scott Hawthorne, president of Mathews Bros., didn't give up when times were tough. He dug in and continued to expect the most from his employees, create the best product, and support his community. At Friday's ceremony, he acknowledged the efforts of his employees, and recognized several who had reached the 10-year mark and Howard Hurd, who marked 35 years of dedicated service.

State dignitaries, local officials and Kevin Scott, an independent gubernatorial candidate, gathered to celebrate the award presented by Maine MEP board chairman Bruce Pulkkinen. Representatives from the offices of Sens. Susan Collins and Olympia Snowe and U.S. Rep. Mike Michaud; State Rep. Elizabeth Schnieder, chairwoman of the Business Research and Development Committee; state Sen. Chris Rector; state Rep. Mike Thibodeau; state Rep. Jayne Crosby Giles; and state Rep. Les Fossell all noted the importance of Mathews Bros. to the Maine manufacturing community and the business environment in Belfast. Yet Mathews Bros. isn't focused solely on the U.S. market. The company successfully has developed business in Brazil and have explored ties to Asia.

"The award is presented to Mathews Brothers in recognition of the company's success in achieving world-class manufacturing status, implementing best manufacturing practices required to advance in the marketplace and, equally important, demonstrating a commitment to improving the lives of their customers and their community," said Rod Rodrigue, Maine MEP president.

"In the past year, the Belfast-based manufacturer embarked on a two-month train-the-trainer lean manufacturing initiative with Maine MEP that focused on continuous improvement activities," remarked State Sen. Schnieder. "The initiative delivered lean training to 116 company employees and helped the company achieve preliminary cost savings of \$75,000."

"Mathews Brothers also has aggressively pursued a strategy of global engagement," said state Sen. Carol Weston. "Recently, the company received a Maine MEP grant that enabled it to participate in a trade mission to Asia organized by the Maine International Trade Center. The trade mission was the latest example of the company's continuous search for new global markets for its products."

"We're deeply honored to receive the 2010 Maine Manufacturing Excellence Award," said Scott Hawthorne, Mathews Bros. president. "Our company has 156 years of commitment to product innovation, quality service and community involvement. With help from Maine MEP, we've continued to build on that tradition and implemented world-class manufacturing strategies that have enabled us to succeed in the face of challenging economic circumstances."

Janet Dutson is the executive director of the Belfast Area Chamber of Commerce. E-mail info@belfastmaine.org for more information.

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