DELAWARE MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP (DEMEP)

Delaware Manufacturing Extension Partnership (DEMEP) is a federally and state funded non-profit organization committed to helping Delaware’s manufacturers improve their global competitiveness. DEMEP is a National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) accredited Center that uses a comprehensive holistic approach to business improvement. The Delaware MEP operates as a recipient through Delaware Technical Community College in partnership with the U.S Department of Commerce, NIST, the Delaware Office of Economic Development, and the Delaware State and local Chambers of Commerce.

Through these partnerships DEMEP draws its resources from local and national universities, community colleges, research institutions, private consultants and a network of over 60 MEP centers nationwide. With these unique relationships, the Delaware MEP can provide its clients confidential access to their industries best practices, processes and business improvement methodologies. DEMEP and the nationwide NIST MEP network have developed a collection of tools, products and services customized to meet the unique needs of Delaware’s Manufacturers.

The MEP National Network™ is a unique public-private partnership that delivers comprehensive, proven solutions to U.S. manufacturers, fueling growth and advancing U.S. manufacturing.
WE'RE IN HOT WATER!

ABOUT SOLAR UNLIMITED NORTH AMERICA. Solar Unlimited North America designs and installs solar hot water systems for domestic hot water and space heating. Based in Lewes, Delaware, the full-service shop offers turnkey solutions that make it easy for customers to go solar. The company’s five-person team, led by president George Chambers, handles all aspects of commercial solar system implementation—from design, engineering, and permits, to grant applications, installation, and training. Solar Unlimited’s goal is to help commercial property owners and nonprofits take control of their energy future while creating a greener planet.

THE CHALLENGE. Like many small businesses, Solar Unlimited was struggling in a downturned economy. When Chambers received a call from Global Delaware to pitch a trade mission to Mexico, he decided he had nothing to lose and much to gain by exploring the option. Global Delaware connected Solar Unlimited to the Delaware Manufacturing Extension Partnership (DEMEP), a NIST MEP affiliate at Delaware Technical Community College. Chambers decided to enroll in DEMEP’s ExporTech training program to get the help he needed to expand his business in a foreign market.

MEP CENTER’S ROLE. Chambers said he likes to set goals, and his goal was to sell to 12 new hospitals in Mexico in 2016. He identified two key obstacles: the language barrier, specifically for translating technical terms into Spanish; and establishing a local partner in Mexico, along with import support. The ExporTech classes gave Chambers the resources and knowledge he needed to overcome these obstacles and succeed in expanding his business to Mexico. Chambers noted that he was the first in the marketplace, which gives him an advantage, but he also has to face the challenge of convincing business owners to trust in his product and process. He said one of the biggest objections, both in the US and Mexico, is his solar hot water seeming “too good to be true” because of the amount of energy it can save organizations—as much as 80 percent. The ExporTech training introduced Chambers to the Export-Import Bank, which offered loans that were guaranteed at 85 percent of the project. These loans remove the money objection for the customer and lower the cost of borrowing for the hospital. Chambers is currently involved in two pilot projects with the largest hospital system in Mexico. If all goes well with his two pilot projects, he will have the opportunity to sell to the 22 other hospitals in the group.

"I recommend that other companies give ExporTech consideration. I’m glad they recruited me. Most people want to know everything before they do anything. In the world of exporting, this is not possible. But the ExporTech program can give you the resources to be a problem solver. I believe that there’s always a way, once you know there’s a way."

-George Chambers, President

RESULTS

- $755,000 in pilot projects
- $4,000,000 available after successful pilot projects
- Obtained loans guaranteeing 85% of the project
- Up to 80% energy reduction per project