

## INNOVATION SUPPORTS IMPENDING GROWTH

**ABOUT RHINO FOODS INC.** Rhino Foods manufactures products for ice cream and frozen dessert companies around the world. Founded in 1981 as Chessy's Frozen Custard in Winooski, Vermont, the family-owned business has since moved to Burlington, Vermont, and employs over one hundred people. The foundation of Rhino's success is built on owner Ted Castle's unwavering commitment to the company's purpose and four core principles, which have guided Rhino's growth for over three decades. Every new employee spends an hour with Ted learning about the purpose and principles during their first days at Rhino Foods.

**THE CHALLENGE.** Rhino Foods needed to increase the value and quantity of new product ideas in their pipeline in order to meet annual growth targets. It also needed to diversify its customer base to reduce dependence on one large customer. After completing a project with the Vermont Manufacturing Extension Center (VMEC), a NIST MEP affiliate, company leaders attended VMEC's Innovation Engineering Leadership Institute and Executive Program. Their objective for this project was to re-implement the system to increase the number and value of new products in the pipeline while introducing more people to the innovation program's fundamental skills, tools, and systems.

**MEP CENTER'S ROLE.** Rhino specifically wanted to focus on increasing the number of ideas through the discovery process, as well as apply the new IE structure of Project Leader Management Coach - Process Coach. Ten leaders completed the Create, Communicate and Commercialize digital and lab classes, and some also completed the extra online learning assignments. VMEC followed up on the IE fundamentals training with a Stimulus Mining lab and 4-hour Create session. The stimulus mining and Create session focused on the Very Important Opportunity of "New bakery-style products and concepts" and generated over 40 ideas. Eight of those ideas moved on to the Define State, and of those, two ideas moved on to Discovery and the Fail Fast Fail Cheap cycles of learning: Gluten Free Cookie Dough and De-Constructed Desserts.

The company set weekly update meetings and project coaching with the Project Leader Management Coach - Process Coach, and both new product concept ideas moved to the "make it real" stage. If the sample products are successful, the next steps are to "show the customer," followed by a recommendation and decision to "Go to Development" or "Kill/Archive" the project. With the new products, Rhino plans to invest in new equipment, increase sales, and retain jobs.

"VMEC is a reliable and trusted partner for Rhino Foods. Innovation Engineering is a perfect example of where VMEC is helping Vermont manufacturers lead and compete on a global scale."

-Dan Kiniry, Director of Marketing

## RESULTS



Increased/retained sales of  
**\$2,000,000**



**10** new/retained jobs



New products: **\$100,000**



**\$250,000** capital investment

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