

CENTURY-OLD COMPANY STAYS COMPETITIVE WITH LEAN MANUFACTURING

ABOUT WHITNEY BROS CO. For a company to be around over 100 years, it must be doing something right. Beginning in 1904 as a manufacturer of wooden wagons and doll house furniture for children, Whitney Brothers grew to become one of the world's leading manufacturers of early learning and institutional childcare wooden furnishings and accessories. With over 30 employees, the company blends old world craftsmanship with state-of-the-art CNC manufacturing technology at its facility in Keene, New Hampshire.

THE CHALLENGE. Whitney Brothers was seeing increased competition from imports, prompting the company to evaluate its internal processes. "There were issues with customer complaints" said Mike Jablonski, President. "We didn't have a system to handle them, which led to upset customers and office friction." When Whitney Brothers was bidding on a million-dollar piece of business, the purchasing agent asked Jablonski if he'd ever heard of Lean Manufacturing. "If you don't go Lean, you'll be out of business in 10 years," he said, referring Jablonski to the book Lean Thinking by Daniel T. Jones and James P. Womack. "The light bulb went off," Jablonski says. Since Whitney Brothers could not raise its prices in the competitive environment, the company bet its hopes on implementing Lean in order to stay competitive.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. Whitney Brothers engaged the New Hampshire Manufacturing Extension Partnership (NHMEP), part of the MEP National Network, to provide training and coaching in the Principles of Lean Manufacturing, Value Stream Mapping, and Kaizen. The company made great progress and built a strong foundation in Lean, but more work was needed. Eight years after their first Lean training, Whitney Brothers invited NHMEP back to re-set the Lean initiative. After completing a gap analysis, NHMEP found improvement opportunities for Whitney Brothers in the areas of standard work, continuous improvement, mistake proofing, pull systems, and balanced production. The company invested in new equipment and software and embraced the principals of Visual Workplace, recognizing the importance of visual communication for supporting employee engagement. Whitney Brothers installed gemba boards, eliminated bottlenecks, improved workflow, and reduced customer order delivery time. The improvements yielded cost savings and boosted sales, increasing the company's gross profit margin by a significant percent.

"We have conducted many improvement activities over the years, but none have had as positive an impact as Lean Manufacturing. The key to Lean is empowering employees to find ways to eliminate waste in the business. NHMEP did a great job of training all our employees with basic Lean Principles and then leading us on high-level improvement events."

-Mike Jablonski, President

RESULTS



\$200,000 capital investment



Saved \$180,000 by eliminating bottlenecks



Increase in sales of \$550,000



Reduced customer order delivery time by 35%



Increased gross profit margin by 16%

CONTACT US



172 Pembroke Road
Concord, NH 03301



(603)226-3200



www.nhmep.org

