

## A MANUFACTURING PARTNERSHIP AS LOYAL AS MAN'S BEST FRIEND

**ABOUT WEST PAW DESIGN.** In 1996, Montana-native Spencer Williams purchased a small pet toy company in Livingston, Montana. With five full-time employees and a team of home-sewers, West Paw set out to make the world's safest and highest quality dog and cat toys. Since then, West Paw has been named "[One of the Best Small Companies](#)" in America by Forbes magazine. As Montana's first Benefit Corporation and the first pet product company to become a Certified B Corp, West Paw has also been recognized as the "Best Place to Work in Montana." The company has around 75 employees and exports to approximately 35 countries. It also recently became the first company in Montana with a registered manufacturing apprenticeship program.

**THE CHALLENGE.** West Paw was founded in the same year that the College of Engineering at Montana State University received funding from the Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) program to create the Montana Manufacturing Extension Center (MMEC), part of the MEP National Network. The startup became one of MMEC's first clients. For a time, West Paw was the only large pet toy and pet bed company manufacturing in the USA. Spencer wanted to invest in his home state by building a "state-of-the-art, eco-friendly manufacturing facility" in Bozeman, rather than outsourcing to China. The company was also committed to producing environmentally friendly products through sustainable manufacturing practices. Achieving global success and growing a skilled workforce in a rural city and state had many inherent challenges, not the least of which was access to expert resources. Fortunately, MMEC was available to help.

**MEP CENTER'S ROLE.** In its startup phase, West Paw worked closely with MMEC to set up efficient manufacturing processes and lay out the facility to optimize production flow. When the company made the move from its original location in Livingston to Bozeman in 1998, MMEC helped plan the transition so well that production was down for just one day. Over the course of the company's 20-plus years, West Paw has called on MMEC for assistance with a variety of growth, innovation and profit enhancement initiatives. Projects included software improvements to enable forecasting of sales, material and personnel; analysis and implementation of new equipment for process automation; upgrades to inventory and tracking systems; expansion and optimization of supply chain partners; and training of production and office personnel on Lean/Continuous Improvement processes.

West Paw and MMEC have also been working together to lead and promote the growth of a regional manufacturing partnership. The company is adding and retaining jobs, growing sales, and investing in improvement projects.

**"MMEC has been a trusted partner for us since the very beginning, and their expertise has been critical to our continued growth and success. They are an indispensable resource in our rural state."**

-Spencer Williams, President

## RESULTS



Over **\$800,000** in increased and retained sales



**30** new or retained jobs



Over **\$200,000** in new investment

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