

BUSINESS CONTINUITY WITH SUPPORT OF STUDENT-RUN MANUFACTURING ENTERPRISE

ABOUT BETTER BAKED FOODS LLC. Better Baked Foods, founded in 1970, is a manufacturer for traditional frozen pizza, french bread pizza, and sandwich items for private-label customers and food-service venues. The company was a family-owned business until 2019, when Schwan's acquired the company with its three factories in Erie and North East, Pennsylvania, and Westfield, New York. Approximately 450 employees serve across the three facilities.

THE CHALLENGE. The Better Baked Foods' facility in Westfield, New York, serves as the bakery for mass producing bread. It is then transferred to the other facilities for toppings, freezing and shipping. Maintenance Manager Scott Pierce said they were having difficulty procuring replacement parts for the conveyor system. Specific parts, such as the conveyor sprocket, were obsolete because the original equipment manufacturer (OEM) discontinued that conveyor belt model to replace it with new technology.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. Brittany Gribble (former FSQ supervisor) at Better Baked Foods saw a story in the news about McDowell Manufacturing, a student-run manufacturing enterprise at McDowell High School. NWIRC, part of the Pennsylvania MEP and the MEP National Network™, partners with McDowell for this career awareness and work readiness program. Students participate in a manufacturing enterprise that is making actual parts and delivering services as part of the supply chain for local manufacturers. Pierce reached out to Kyle Bucholtz, teacher advisor for the program, to see if his students could help.

For this collaboration, the students would need to reverse engineer the sprocket from a sample provided because there were no drawings or specifications available. The students also needed to understand the application for the part and the various features of the part that were important for proper operation. Pierce then sourced the Delrin® plastic because of its durability.

After a couple months, a prototype was ready and ran on the conveyor for two weeks to verify. After the successful test-run, Pierce received a quote and placed his order for 21 sprockets. "The job was challenging because Better Baked Foods only had a replica part which needed to be reverse engineered, modeled, and CAM files created," said Bucholtz at McDowell Manufacturing. "The students worked through it with success and now love being able to walk down the grocery store aisle to see a food product that a part they produced was vital to create. Providing real projects adds a level of excitement to education that can't happen in a traditional classroom."

"I really didn't know what to expect because I considered this advanced work, but the students jumped right in and I was impressed with what they were able to do. We produce over 60,000 pounds of product per day from the Westfield facility that gets transported to the two other locations for finishing. If that bakery doesn't run, the other facilities can't run either, so it was critical for us to find a solution."

-Scott Pierce, Maintenance Manager

RESULTS



450 retained jobs



\$5,800,000 in retained sales



\$200,000 in cost savings

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