

EXTRUSION MACHINE MANUFACTURER REACHING INNOVATION GOALS WITH MEP CENTER CONNECTIONS AND SUPPORT

ABOUT US EXTRUDERS. US Extruders manufactures custom single-screw extruders, extrusion systems and screws for plastic, rubber & silicone. Each machine or project is a user-focused design, built to unique specs. The machine manufacturer operates a 47,700-square-foot facility in Westerly, Rhode Island, that runs on 100% solar power, one example of the company's commitment to sustainability and innovation.

THE CHALLENGE. The company has experienced steady growth since its founding in 2017. In 2022, US Extruders President challenged his team to become the subject matter experts in extrusion plastics recycling. Specifically, the company wanted to pursue an innovative idea for recycling fishing nets made of various polymers (plastics). The company wanted to hire team members to invest time in research and training. At the time, however, US Extruders was considering a facility expansion and dealing with the global pandemic; time was precious. Business development lead John Riendeau, who had worked with Polaris MEP previously, reached out to Rhode Island's MEP Center, part of the MEP National Network™, to leverage their employee development resources.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. The Rhode Island Department of Labor & Training had tapped Polaris MEP to lead a workforce initiative called "Machine & Marine," leveraging CARES ACT funding to support hiring and training of employees. US Extruders had an assembler on staff named Brandon Mello with a passion for R&D. Polaris MEP guided Riendeau through the application process for reimbursed wages and internal training. The "Machine & Marine" program provided some incentives for the company to support Brandon and a second employee.

Mello noted that he had a diverse manufacturing skillset but, "I had no experience with plastics. So, when I came to US Extruders, it was amazing. I was able to work with the director of process technology almost daily, learning the ins and outs of the plastic industry, and how various resins will work in extrusion." Mello went from assembler to an integral part of the team researching and testing plastic recycling through extrusion.

Today he is managing the company's new R&D lab. Mello said that the time in intensive learning was thanks to the workforce training funding. "We're not worrying about a bottom line in that situation. We're more focused on innovation and improving technology. It's much more proactive." Riendeau and Mello later tapped into Polaris MEP's local industry connections as they began to explore and test recycling of other plastics. A Polaris MEP project manager connected them to a local textile company, expediting research into recycling polyester (PET).

"The expertise, the skilled staff, and the understanding that the MEP program nationally and Polaris MEP in particular has, all contributed to growing our knowledge base about plastics and plastics recycling. I just encourage people to pick up the phone and reach out to Polaris MEP."

-John Riendeau, Business Development Director

RESULTS



2 added jobs



1 retained job



\$500,000 retained sales



\$20,000 cost savings



\$20,000 invested in new equipment & information systems

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