

ForwardFocus

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Inside this Issue:

- 3 Meet Erik Wahl
- 3 Benchmark Enlisted
- 5 MilTech Jumpstart

Plus

**7-8 Conference
Sneak Peek**

Montana Manufacturing Center

University Technical Assistance Program

When DoD Knocks... Complacency – Not an Option

By Deborah Nash, MMEC

One of the great dangers for companies that have been around awhile is becoming complacent with the way things are, not taking action when a large buyer shows interest in your product.

"After 15 years, I was very comfortable; in a cocoon," says Bob Ricketts of Doctor Down in Polson, Mont.

Doctor Down manufactures an innovative, high quality, medical transport bedding system, the Rescue Wrap®, used successfully in many different applications from air and ground ambulances, search and rescue teams and National Park emergency medical stations to military medical trauma teams, and industrial first aid management worldwide. It was patented and approved by the FDA in 1994. The design was conceived after an inquiry came in from St. Patricks Life Flight in Missoula, Mont. requesting a sleeping bag type product to replace 30 pounds of blankets they had been using in patient transport.

According to Ricketts, since that time the domestic market for his product has been pretty constant with growth averaging about 20 percent each year.

Begins to Snowball

In 2004, what had been steady growth began to look like exponential growth. The Department of Defense (DoD) became interested in the Rescue Wrap.

Fortunately, at Doctor Down such a "sniff" was recognized as market opportunity; complacency was not an option.

"I did the smart thing back in 1994; I invested in patent and copyright and



Doctor Down staff pose with Bill Nicholson, MMEC Field Engineer (left), outside its Three Dog Down retail outlet in Polson.

have seen growth each year. Last year, we received a sniff from the US Army for 10,000 bags to come in smaller orders. Interest was beginning to snowball," Ricketts recalls.

The Rescue Wrap system was originally designed for mobile health care providers to keep patients warm and dry while providing easy, unlimited access to injuries. It helps organize intravenous lines and improves patient comfort. All design improvements have been customer focused and health safety conscious. The product gained exposure during television news coverage of the Pfc. Jessica Lynch rescue in Iraq. The Wrap was used to keep her warm and comfortable during transport from the rescue site to a U.S. medical post. Handling such trauma inspired the more stealth Ranger version of the product.

Call to action

Making the DoD supplier leap wasn't easy. For many years, Doctor Down has subcontracted most of its sewing to small companies in the area, doing repair and development in-house. With DoD interest, capacity became an issue. After arranging additional financial backing, the owner reached out for assistance from Montana Manufacturing Extension Center (MMEC) and the Montana Procurement Technical Assistance Center.

After providing some initial costing assistance, MMEC pulled in its MilTech services to ensure that DoD contracts could be met. MilTech is a unique MMEC partnership with TechLink that is designed to "accelerate the transition of new technology to the U.S. warfighter." (see sidebar on the MilTech program, page 5)

"The program was able to offer a co-pay arrangement that helped me get on board. At 50 percent less cost, it was a definite jumpstart," Ricketts says.

With the jumpstart, the company was able to deliver to DoD quickly, reliably and cost effectively by expanding production and further improve product quality. It continues to work with MMEC on manufacturing and business

(continued on page 4)

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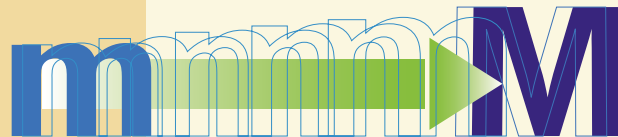
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Come Run With Peers & Allies

Normally, I don't use this space to brag, unless it is about Montana's Manufacturers. But this is too good to keep to myself.

Our *stellar* home office team — Margie Jensen, Deborah Nash and Stacey Scott — won a national award at the MEP National Training Conference in Orlando in May! They received NIST MEP's "Unsung Hero" recognition for *"offering immeasurable support so we, the field staff, can focus exclusively and efficiently on service delivery"* — which is critical given our small staff and huge territory.



continuous improvement

Please join me in congratulating Margie, Deborah and Stacey on their **NATIONAL** award.

On another note...Are you planning to attend **IMTS 2006**, the International Manufacturing Technology Show September 6-13, 2006 at McCormick Place in Chicago? MMEC's *extreme* resident expert on machine tooling and manufacturing processes, Dale Detrick, spent 25 years operating a business that specialized in custom design and manufacture of machines for notable U.S. companies. He thrives on staying abreast of the latest in this field and plans to attend. If you would like to learn more about what you are seeing with a more personal, informative touch, think about aligning your trip with ours. **Let us know you are going**, and we will work to maximize the networking opportunities.

Events like these are extremely powerful. I constantly bring back new ideas and coalesce my palette of ideas from interactions I have while attending such events. That flat wouldn't happen if I just sat behind my desk all day. New

ideas — new ways of looking at things — come from people spending time with people. My thoughts transform in ways that otherwise would not be possible.

Here at the Manufacturing Center, we are busy putting together our fifth Compete Smart, a special conference for all Montana manufacturers. Planning for it takes nearly a year. And some great stuff is in store for you.

I know rededicating days out of a busy schedule seems painful, but it can have lasting rewards. Why? Because Compete Smart is all about sculpting relationships and taking time to step back from your day-to-day decision-packed world to refresh — spend time with your peers and allies.

Each season, Compete Smart unveils company leaders from across the state to paint a picture of what helps them succeed in business, what makeovers are working for them. One of my advisory board members says hearing real stories sends him back to his company with new ideas and optimism for improvement.

This year we're offering a unique collage of interaction between high school students, higher education opportunities, and manufacturing leaders in a special tour and showcase. We hope it will encourage careers in manufacturing as well as mentoring opportunities. Other conference features include a visionary keynote speaker, Montana product showcase, knowledgeable exhibitors and a well rounded selection of breakout sessions to create more canvas for interaction and tools for your business.

When you go back to your plant, you apply the brush of continuous improvement, reflect on what you saw and heard, and apply your brush again. The palette of breakouts, networking events and plant tours will help frame a landscape for new possibilities.

Make a commitment right now to participate in Compete Smart.

Steve Holland, MMEC Director

Meet ERIK WAHL Artist and Business Visionary

Erik Wahl will help redefine your commonly held assumptions about vision, goals, and success with his program "The Art of Vision" during the fifth **Compete Smart** Manufacturing Conference on October 4 and 5, 2006 in Helena.

Erik's keynote address will launch this season's themed activities "Extreme Makeover: It Starts with a Vision" during the opening luncheon. His special blend of warmth, humor and experience will help you identify your unchallenged roadblocks to success and makeover the way you think about doing business. His unique understanding of vision traces back to his training as an artist, strengthened by eight years as a partner in the corporate



Erik Wahl

world. He holds a Bachelor's degree from the University of San Diego where he studied both art and business. After first working in the business world and playing with his art, he now plays in the business world by working with his art.

Passionately committed to helping businesses explore new levels of vision and performance through creativity, he

founded The Wahl Group, a consulting firm specializing in helping organizations identify and implement breakthrough thinking to achieve extraordinary results.

By breaking apart the traditional rules, Erik will challenge you to sharpen your

own creative skills. The principles in his highly practical message redefine the role of a leader as an artist as well as an architect. They will help you identify a personal style for inspiring yourself and



others to rethink vision and purpose and start your own **Extreme Makeover**.

Listen and observe as he dynamically choreographs a painting that will leave you in awe. Conference sessions that follow will provide strategies for implementing your renewed vision and give you practical tools to get you started.

A Win-Win... Doctor Down Enlists Benchmark's Skills

Benchmark Manufacturing in Helena was recently selected by Doctor Down to join its supplier base to help meet commitments for the Rescue Wrap® Ranger to the Department of Defense. One criteria that attracted Doctor Down was the sheltered workshop orientation of the company which is a subsidiary of Helena Industries, Inc. It's commitment to quality and professional attitude were also key factors.

Benchmark is one of several manufacturing-related divisions at Helena Industries with a mission to "provide vocational and rehabilitation services through real work, related services and individualized resources to empower persons with disabilities to lead productive, fulfilling lives in their communities." A wood products division, mail center and janitorial service are other services offered at Helena Industries, according to Gail Jester, Benchmark plant manager. At the Helena Industries manufacturing operations, people with and without disabilities work side by side

in all facilities and services. Benchmark has been manufacturing backpacks and briefcases for the US Forest Service for 25 years.

"We are proud to offer real skills in a competitive environment," Jester says. "It's a very normalizing experience."

Benchmark is outfitted with equipment to meet the challenges of the complex Rescue Wrap production. Typical jobs might be web or fabric cutting, sewing machine operation, pattern machine operation, snap and grommet setting, material handling, assembly, inspection and packaging.

During a qualifying visit, Doctor Down took samples in and enough product to make two complete Rescue Wraps. Satisfied with the result, the two firms then came to terms with an initial purchase order for 50 Wraps to further explore their working relationship.

"The initial visit was really an inspection, an examination of the quality of their program because with a medical device, quality and cleanliness are very

important," Doctor Down owner Bob Ricketts, explains. "Benchmark showed us their capability and prompted me to update and send CAD drawings, operating professionally, sharing information electronically."

"It's a grassroots up way of improving people's lives. I like that the shelters bid at real wages that, down the road, can bring independence for their workers."

The production knowledge of MilTech engineer Al Diebert was instrumental in getting the ball rolling, he adds.

The companies continue to do business together, and several other sheltered workshops and other subs are in place, keeping current with orders as needed.

(continued on page 5)

Doctor Down (continued from cover)

system improvements and has ramped up sales and capability in 2005 by a whopping 850 percent. In the first quarter of 2006, new DoD solicitations have increased orders by 30 percent over the entire previous year, according to the owner.

"MMEC is providing excellent service, moral support and the 'how to' in beefing up capacity and systems," says Ricketts. He undersells his own business prowess when he humbly adds, "You don't have to be smart, just get smart people involved. I like the Montana flavor of MMEC. The field staff are not 'suits' but down to earth, committed to Montana."

That same commitment to Montana is part of the flavor of Doctor Down and its retail counterpart Three Dog Down in Polson. Ricketts notes that key to his business plan is creating more jobs in Montana and helping sheltered workshops provide employment.

Of course, he also wants to make a profit and be successful, and building a strong supplier base here and in neighboring states is part of that strategy.

Supplier development

Outgrowing his subcontracts and facilities, Ricketts tasked MilTech with helping him find suppliers with competitive rates and high quality standards, with the special emphasis on sheltered workshops with textile skills.

Al Deibert, MilTech program manager and engineer, helped Ricketts meet and qualify professional sewing shops. An early effort included two exploratory trips to Benchmark Manufacturing, a subsidiary of Helena Industries, a sheltered workshop in the state's capital. (see related story, page 2)

MMEC's Field Engineer Bill Nicholson continues to advise Doctor Down as growth continues. He created and monitors an action items list for the company



Rescue Wrap Ranger at work in field operations

that helps address questions like "What's killing you today? What's slowing you down?"

Under the Lean umbrella, the improvement team has identified non-value added tasks that kill efficiencies, crossing them off one at time, as solutions are put into place.

Nicholson also worked with the team on an easy-to-use scheduling tool and capacity model that helps visualize and

handle the fluctuations in orders and looks out past the immediate calendar.

Communications tools were beefed up for in-house staff and several improvement projects are bringing in expertise from other consultants in Montana.

"I'm getting affordable assistance and counseling on business that I can't do myself," Ricketts notes.

Scheduling Organized

While the domestic market has been consistent, military orders fluctuate with quiet times and then need for hundreds at a time. The scheduling model looks at production, pieces needed per week, products (the bedding system has cores, shells, disposable liners, etc.), and identifies constraints in product mix, helping ensure on-time delivery.

Initially, the capacity tool helped highlight unacceptable lead times, Nicholson said, and brought to light a need to find more capacity. Even without the DoD orders, this tool helps to better manage the many small orders that routinely come into the company.

"I got them started with a simple little white board that showed capacity and time in a grid. This allowed them to book out to week 38 comfortably," said MMEC's engineer.

The tools he built for Doctor Down monitor capacity bottlenecks and take the mental pressure off, according to Ricketts. "It's presented in a way that a small business person can comprehend.

It helps me make quick decisions by flagging where the constraints are; plugging in the next level of sewers based on their capacity."

It had a definite impact on meeting delivery within a specified timeframe. Ricketts can now "see inside the pipe" — invaluable for anyone with frustrations in production, he notes.

Getting additional help

"At Doctor Down, we described business as a three legged stool," says Nicholson. "I help with manufacturing issues; marketing assistance is being handled by private consultant Fraser McLeay who is exploring different agencies of the military to gain entry. McLeay is a former Montana World Trade Center advisor. And the third leg, financials/growth issues is coming from Al Deibert.

Fulfilling the demand for DoD has been a definite homerun for us, Ricketts says. "I am proud to work with MMEC not only because they have helped me become more successful, but because they have allowed me to create over 25 new jobs for the state of Montana. All of these are in HUB zone certified regions and half are in sheltered workshops around the state." ■



CEO Bob Ricketts and MMEC Field Engineer Bill Nicholson show sample brand recognition options available on the Rescue Wrap.

Benchmark (continued from page 3)

"I like working with sheltered workshops," Ricketts says. "They are set up with space and personnel for contract work. It's a grassroots up way of improving people's lives. I like that the shelters bid at real wages that, down the road, can bring independence for their workers. Providing work for them is a win for the state."

"We are very proud to be part of something so meaningful with Doctor Down," Jester says.

As Doctor Down has worked to standardize and streamline its AutoCad drawings, Jester, whose group also uses CAD, has provided input and feedback. And like Doctor Down, Benchmark products are made in America by American workers.

The Doctor Down business is a welcome influx for Jester's crew.

"Seeing the outcome in manufacturing goods, and seeing people learn and grow is the best," she states proudly. "The timing and quantity of the product worked out phenomenally well as we have had some excess capacity in the shop."

Benchmark is sensitive to capacity issues and the competitive pressures faced by all manufacturers. Jester knows from long experience that a government contract doesn't mean receiving regular orders. Orders come in based on need. Because of its relationship with Helena Industries, Benchmark faces audits and must meet accreditation standard. It is also inspected by military and government agencies for quality compliance. Even import pressures from overseas backpack production has impacted Benchmark.

"Our first GSA order for soft-sided bags was 8,000 per month. Today we make about 200 per month," she said. The company makes other packs for fire



Liz Schroeder at Benchmark sewing a web subassembly for the Rescue Wrap

gear, personal gear, walk-in units, and fireline units, producing over 52,000 back packs and field packs for the U.S. Forest Service in the past year as well as thousands of other products.

Partnership jumpstarts select technologies for DoD

The MilTech program at MMEC that has been helping Doctor Down ramp up to meet its contracts with the Department of Defense (DoD) for the Rescue Wrap® Ranger is a unique partnership started right here in Montana. Its goal is to ensure that innovative defense-related technology is more efficiently and cost-effectively transitioned from DoD labs and private industry to the U.S. warfighter.

MilTech blends the strategic mission of TechLink, a nationally recognized technology transfer center, and the manufacturing expertise of MMEC and its Manufacturing Extension Partnership network affiliates across the Northwest. The partnership is helping expedite the commercialization and manufacturing steps for selected new technologies that support the DoD mission.

"Accelerating the transition of new technology to the U.S. warfighter."



TechLink's mission is to create high-value partnerships between the U.S. Department of Defense and private industry to develop, transfer, and commercialize leading-edge technologies. It is an authorized DoD Partnership Intermediary funded through the DoD Office of Technology Transition.

MilTech's customer is Department of Defense deployable operations branches.

Services are provided to eligible companies to help them meet DoD requirements and mitigate product acquisition and life-cycle risks that can have a huge impact on small companies like Doctor Down. MilTech can jumpstart projects that meet eligibility requirements and arrange for additional improvement services that may be fee based. It may also provide grants to small companies to enable them to pay for outside services in meeting DoD contract requirements for eligible products.

Key eligibility requirements at this time are location in the northwest U.S., verifiable interest in innovative products by DoD or a project involving technology licensed from TechLink, in which case location in the U.S. is not restricted.

Manufacturing News

Groundbreaking Ceremony Launches GSK Expansion

The May 9 groundbreaking for **GlaxoSmithKline** in Hamilton launches expansion plans that will include a two-story administrative building and a research and development building, according to the Ravalli Republic newspaper. A 30,000+ square-foot production facility will also be added after first being constructed in Sweden by a company called Pharmadule. Once it is operational, the building will be shipped in pieces to be reassembled in Hamilton. Twenty-five new employees have come on board in the past few months with at least 130 expected over the next three years, the news article states. About 160 people are currently employed at the plant.

Bacterin Receives International Honor

Belgrade-based **Bacterin International** was awarded the National Business Incubation Association's 2006 Outstanding Incubator Graduate award on May 2. The award was presented to Bacterin's CEO Guy Cook, a world expert on biofilms, at the National Business Incubation Association's 20th International Conference in St. Louis, Mo. The award recognizes a start-up company that had met its respective incubator's graduation criteria and since then had been operating on its own. Bacterin graduated from local incubator TechRanch <http://www.techranch.org> at the end of 2003 and moved operations to Belgrade. Visit <http://www.bacterin.com>.

Free Service for Workplace Safety Needs

Under a grant from OSHA the **Montana Safety Bureau**, the **Department of Industry and Labor**, will provide, at an employer's request, a confidential comprehensive safety and health consultation at no cost. Consultations are limited to employers with less than 250 employees. Employers in high hazard industries are given priority. Phone: (406) 444-6418. For more information check this Web site: <http://erd.dli.mt.gov/safetyhealth/occshealthconsult.asp>

Lunch Opportunities

The **Gallatin Development Corporation** offers monthly Manufacturing Roundtables and Technology Alliance lunch meetings featuring a experts in fields of interest to Montana businesses. A small fee is charged to cover lunch and meeting space, and both members and non-members are welcome. Check out events and registration at www.bozeman.org/cgi-bin/gdc/cal_main.html

Price of Metals Soars

China is using 25 percent of the world's copper today driving prices up and impacting supply costs, according to manufacturers who rely on such raw materials. Three years ago, copper was trading for less than a dollar a pound. Today it hovers at \$3.30 per pound.

Growth Thru Ag Award

A Hamilton, Mont. company **Trapper Creek Winery** recently received an \$18,600 grant for advertising and promotion through the Montana Department of Agriculture Growth Through Ag grant program. Owner Ken Schultz praised the program in a Ravalli Republic newsrelease saying it is important to promote Montana products and that wineries play a role in the future of Montana agriculture. According to the report winery, numbers in the state have grown from 1 in 2000 to 15 today. The raw materials for Trapper Creek wines are grown locally and picked locally.

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Call MMEC 406-994-3812 or 1-800-MEP-4MFG

Altus Automation Offering Automated Solutions

Altus Automation (www.altusautomation.com), dedicated to being an industry leader in commissioning and qualifying complex control systems, announces that it now offers automated solutions for manufacturing clients located in Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, North Dakota, and South Dakota. The Bozeman based company has particular expertise in industrial control systems, manufacturing execution systems, ISO 9000 compliance, and plant automation, according to Director of Operations John Verzuh, with particular expertise in automated control systems that incorporate shop floor control, batch processing, alarm management, ERP, and SCADA.

Implementing automation technology presents a unique opportunity for western states to stay competitive in the marketplace through better quality and lower operating costs over a product's life cycle.

DOL Announces Competencies Model

The U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration (ETA) has announced the creation of a dynamic framework of skills and competencies for advanced manufacturers to use in attracting and training workers. Designed for careers across the industry, it will be a tool to develop job requirements; for curriculum development; and for overall career exploration.

The ETA convened a group of leading industry organizations to develop the framework over the past year. The group reviewed existing industry standards and curricula and identified common elements that apply across manufacturing sectors. Those elements include working with spreadsheets, interpreting CAD (Computer-Aided Design) drawings, and database navigation and reporting. This framework allows for consistency across industries, customization within sectors, and easy updating to accommodate changing technology and business practices.

Compete Smart to Feature...

Extreme Student Showcase & Road Tour

Industrial Technology students from Capital High School, Helena High and the UM Helena College of Technology (COT) are gearing up for an Extreme Student Showcase at the COT Airport Campus this fall. The Showcase is part of the Road Tours piece of this fall's **Compete Smart** Manufacturing Conference in Helena on October 4 & 5.

The morning road trip will include tours of the COT machine shop, welding shop and aircraft maintenance shop as well as student showcases of their creative projects in an effort to create a bridge and awareness between manufacturers and the kinds of educational resources that help build a future, skilled workforce for the important economic sector — *manufacturing*. Instructor Art Warner is spearheading the COT event in collaboration with instructors Jim Weber from Capital High and Cindy Sologub from Helena High and a select group of students.

MMEC Field Engineer Todd Dan-

iels is also working with the groups and reports, "Tour participants will have an opportunity to win a featured student-crafted item during the showcase."

Choices of Road Tour side trips to these Helena-area manufacturing firms will also be offered: American Chemet, Summit Aeronautics or Helena Independent Record.

The road trip and student interactions with conference goers are being made possible with generous sponsorship support from the **Student Assistance Foundation** (www.safmt.org). This Montana-based non-profit organization offers knowledge and tools for students and parents on start-to-finish education planning. SAF focuses on how to finance post secondary education helping make it a reality for young people and opening doors for future careers including manufacturing. SAF offers a range of programs such as grants, community outreach, and counseling on education finance planning and career goals.

**STUDENT
ASSISTANCE
FOUNDATION**



Helena High School student Derek Daniels works on a project as he develops valuable welding skills

The student showcase and plant tours are just one of many exciting events planned during the conference Compete Smart. For more information on the conference go to www.mtmanufacturingcenter.com/Events/index.htm

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- **Student Showcase & Plant Tours:** Airport campus shops at UM Helena College of Technology, American Chemet, Summit Aeronautics, Helena Independent Record
- **Keynote Luncheon:** Erik Wahl & "The Art of Vision"
- **Montana Product Showcase and Exhibitor Hall**
- **Special Evening Event Oct. 4:** Tour of Lewis & Clark Brewing Company with Brewhouse cookout and dinner under "the Big Top"
- **Breakfast with Exhibitors & Sponsors**
- **Three Montana Company Leaders** on Growing Business in Montana:
 - Brad Reid of Diversified Plastics, Missoula
 - Darrell Miller of Marks-Miller Post & Pole, Clancy
 - Jim Wright of Semitool, Kalispell
- **Five Breakout Tracks** (15 sessions) through the two days:
 - Market Makover: International Perspective
 - Extreme Makeover: The Lean Way
 - Extreme Power: Business Management Essentials
 - Extreme Opportunities: Its Your People
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- **WRAP UP with Feature Guest & Closing Luncheon**
(We're keeping this energizing & entertaining guest CEO under wraps. DON'T MISS IT!)



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