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Plus

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ForwardFocus

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Montana Manufacturing Center

University Technical Assistance Program

Fabrication and Stamping Company Receives Stamp of Approval; ISO Certificate

By Deborah Nash,
MMEC staff writer

With the mark of quality now officially stamped on Bitterroot Tool and Machine, LLC, (BTM) www.bitterroottoolandmachine.com, the doors to more business are opening. This is a result of achieving ISO 9001:2008 quality management systems registration in October 2009. Enlisting the help of several business assistance resources, owners Randy and Bonnie Jones were able to reach a crucial goal that otherwise might never happen for a small firm in rural Montana.

BTM is a contract manufacturer in Stevensville, Mont., designing and producing products for the electronic connector, aerospace, munitions, and other

industrial customers seeking superior quality and innovation in fabricated and stamped parts made from metal and plastic. BTM calls itself the "thin metal experts" (down to .0015"). It uses innovative die designs, skilled toolmakers and a dedicated workforce to grow and develop leading edge stamping technology. The company, started in 1999, has a reputation for innovation, creating or re-tooling equipment to meet diverse customer needs.

GrainMaker Gives Start

BTM also manufactures a proprietary product, the GrainMaker™ Mill, a hand-powered steel, not cast metal, grinder for home grinding of small to large grains, legumes, seeds and nuts. It is sold to local customers and through the Internet at www.grainmaker.com. BTM also makes the hardened alloy steel grinding burrs inside the unit. Recent interest by the public in eating more healthy whole-grains and concerns about the economy have boosted sales, according to Bonnie, who oversees marketing for the product she credits for "starting our business."

While company success has been built on the high quality of its products and tooling, Randy had observed a growing industry trend of customers asking for ISO certification as a requirement for doing business. He knew an effective quality management system was important for long term relationships with his customers.



The steel GrainMaker™ is used for home grinding of grains, legumes and seeds.



Randy and Bonnie Jones with ISO Certificate – the result of much hard work and staff commitment at BTM.

Changing Marketplace

"The marketplace is changing, and we're seeing that Boeing is beginning to care more about second tier supply standards; tier one's used to certify for parts coming from their suppliers [like BTM]. That's changing," he said. "Getting certified allowed us to secure a one-year contract from a customer that is a tier one aerospace supplier and to maintain our relationship because we meet quality criteria."

The ISO standard is a long-standing internationally recognized signal that a company has defined quality goals and objectives and has clear records that demonstrate how well its processes meet those objectives. The records need to indicate what analysis and actions are taken to improve a process when objectives are not being met. The 2008 revision of the standard has been simplified and focuses more on satisfying customers and their needs related to quality

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Clearing Way for Global Market Opportunities

I recently had the privilege of participating in the "Jobs on Main Street, Customers Around the World" conference hosted by the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) in Washington D.C. As the nation's lead trade policy agency, USTR is working to make trade policy work better for America's small- and medium-sized businesses. This is especially important because these companies are America's biggest job creators and a well-spring of export potential and USTR Ambassador Ron Kirk is a member of the President's Cabinet.

I was asked to share views on the challenges faced by small to medium size manufacturers to enter into the export market, views that I gathered from my Advisory Board, District Export Council members and others. (See list on p 6.) I was able to showcase real Montana manufacturing export successes. It was a great opportunity to demonstrate the can-do attitude of Montanans and to show that if exporting can be done successfully from our rural, landlocked state it can be done by businesses anywhere in the U.S.

For perspective, if you superimpose Montana's eastern border on Washington D.C., our western border would reach Chicago in the central U.S. Our cities are small. Yet our companies can and do export successfully from places as rural as Glendive and Stevensville – for more than \$750 million dollars of goods in 2008. It was my pleasure to use Montana as the proxy for much of rural America, where small companies conduct business, provide jobs and strengthen small communities every day.

More and more global markets represent some of the best opportunities for growth. We know from a joint study

with the U.S. Commercial Service that the most successful exporters leverage international sales, growing their overall businesses at twice the rate of exporters that just dabble or reactively serve customers in only one or two countries.

We need to think of export and trade promotion as an investment in our economy and our future. Our interstate highway system paved the way between lucrative markets within the United States allowing for unprecedented economic and job growth during the last century. Trade agreements between lucrative global markets can pave the way in this century. However, agreement terms must be enforced and have transparency for standards and local regulations. Policymakers must consider the mind-set of the small business owner when developing and executing trade



Perspective: Montana reaches from Washington DC to Chicago.

strategies, a mindset of "follow the money;" i.e., look for markets that fit their products first; the status of trade agreements enters the picture much later. The U.S. must anticipate where small companies can effectively do business, and

give those countries high priority when negotiating trade agreements.

For several years MMEC has worked with the Montana World Trade Center, U.S. Commercial Service and the Montana Department of Commerce Trade and International Relations Office to build opportunities and host export workshops. We've participated alongside small manufacturers on trade missions, some led by the state's Congressional delegations, to both sides of the globe.

I am pleased to announce that MMEC is now involved in a growing effort nationally to help companies grow globally. The program, called ExporTech, is a joint effort by US Commercial Services and the NIST Manufacturing Extension Partnership to radically accelerate a company's ability to

(continued on page 6)

MWTC Announces International Business Development Mission to Israel May 31-June 3, 2010

The Montana World Trade Center (MWTC) at The University of Montana will lead an International Business Development Mission to Israel May 31-June 2, 2010. The mission will help Montana companies develop relationships with new clients through prearranged one-on-one meetings. It will also provide an opportunity for companies already doing business in the region to cultivate stronger ties with business partners.

MWTC Executive Director Arnie Sherman believes the mission will result in more products and services exported to Israel, "the market is diverse and very open to partnerships with Montana companies."

Why Israel?

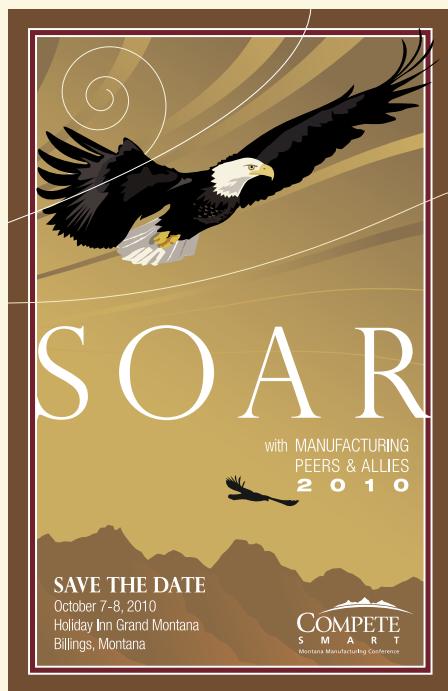
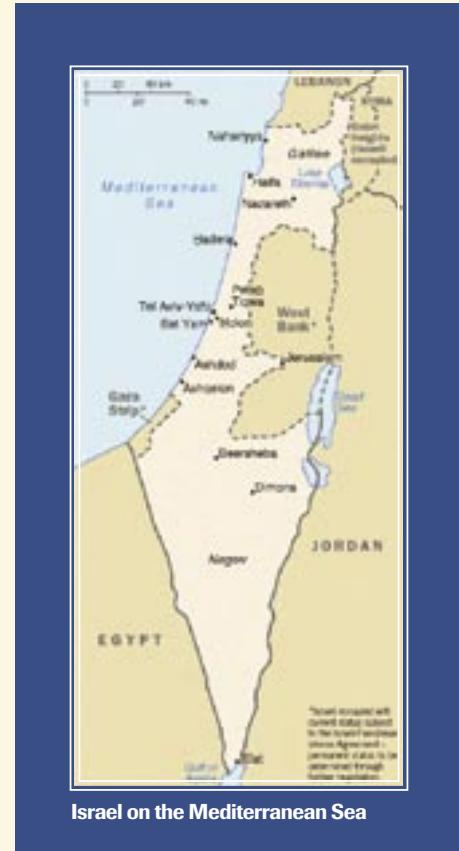
- Exports of U.S. goods to Israel during the first 11 months of 2008 totaled \$13.50 billion.
- The U.S. is Israel's largest single country trade partner, despite heavy European competition.
- Israel-U.S. commerce has grown seven fold since signing the Free Trade Agreement in 1985.

- Nearly all tariffs on trade between U.S. and Israel have been eliminated since 1995.

Why Should Your Company Participate?

- Meetings with pre-screened potential buyers, sales representatives and business partners...MWTC does the legwork for you!
- Network with US Commercial Service staff overseas.
- Customized market intelligence and industry briefings.
- Networking events...international business is based on relationships!
- Cost effective!

If you are interested in learning more about how your company can take advantage of this unique opportunity, please call Megan Harrington at 406.243.5850.



MMEC Can Help with HACCP Planning for Food Safety

HACCP (Hazards Analysis and Critical Control Point) is a systematic approach to food safety addressed through the analysis and control of biological, chemical, and physical hazards from raw material production, procurement and handling, to manufacturing, distribution and consumption of finished product, according to the US Food and Drug Administration. The HACCP plan is a day to day working document to ensure food safety.

Major food retailers have now begun looking for documentation of food safety handling measures even from suppliers who produce fruits and vegetables. To assist such producers, MMEC offers

HACCP planning assistance. Delivered as a full day workshop, it combines HACCP training, identification of hazards, hazard analysis as it relates to a producer's products, and HACCP Plan creation. About 90 percent of the plan will be in place at the conclusion of the project.

Essentially, HACCP means the producer needs to think about how every step could impact the consumer and take steps to prevent possible occurrences. Much like other systems documentation, a corrective action plan is required and a way to verify that the system is working. Call MMEC at 406-994-3812 for assistance.

Bitterroot Tool and Machine (continued from cover)

output. In other words, records and procedures should ultimately provide answers if customers have questions or concerns about a product or part made for them.

Getting certified is still a big undertaking, and Randy credits assistance from several business resource services, Ravalli County Economic Development Authority (RCEDA), the Montana Manufacturing Extension Center (MMEC) and USDA, for helping to make it happen.

Economic Gardening

Today BTM employs nine full-time and three part-time employees. Several jobs were recently added to keep up with increased demand as a result of achieving certification and more may be needed soon. It was the prospect of more, good paying jobs in the area that caught the attention of Julie Foster, Executive Director of the RCEDA <http://www.rceda.org>, during discussions more than a year ago with a local firm that uses BTM precision engineering services. RCEDA works to enhance the Bitterroot Valley by securing funding for programs and facilities development; these funds come from public and private sources. The organization puts an emphasis on development support for existing local businesses and entrepreneurs "whose strong ties to the community are more likely to make economic decisions with social and civic responsibilities in the mix." Referring to RCEDA efforts as "economic gardening," she added that "this approach is essential to protecting the quality of life in the valley that attracts and retains successful business people and employees."

Initiating talks with BTM management to see what might help grow the business, Foster learned that to aggressively pursue additional profitable contracts, BTM would need to invest a significant amount of time, resources and cash into gaining ISO certification, a difficult proposition for a small firm. She immediately thought of the USDA Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEG) <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/busp/rbeg.htm>. This grant helps finance and facilitate



Randy Jones and Julie Foster talk about achievements and plans at BTM facility.

development of small business enterprise in rural areas with populations of less than 50,000 because each new job in rural communities supports local stores and services, and growing firms attract related business, helping keep an area vibrant. She and Randy began gathering information to apply for the grant which was later awarded.

Grants Are Competitive

With the stimulus money today, grants are more available, Foster said. "But back in 2008 they were very hard to get and mostly distributed in large sums. To win the award, she focused on identifying the strong competitive outcomes the BTM project would offer. "Basically, I sit down and listen; find out what a company is doing, how it is impacting locally and what the constraints are. Then we figure out what program, if any, we have that can help. In this case it was RBEG."

Randy contacted the Montana Manufacturing Extension Center Field Engineer Kreg Worrest for a project cost estimate and scope of work after learning about his quality systems expertise during a local business seminar. With that information and details about the company, Foster assisted BTM with the application to USDA, writing the grant that helped pay for planned improvements.

"We wouldn't have been able to tackle it without the USDA Rural Development funds," Randy said. "It was pretty much a full time job to implement." In addition to the staffing commitment,

the company would also have had to pull \$15,000 from the operating budget to pay for the project and ISO Registrar's fees. For a small company during this economic time, "that just ain't going to happen," he quipped.

Gap Assessment Starts Process

Funding helped bring MMEC Field Engineers Kreg Worrest (Missoula) and Todd Daniels (Helena) into BTM in late 2008 to conduct a gap assessment audit to compare existing quality levels and documentation to the ISO standard and developed a plan to achieve certification. Part way through the process, revisions to the 2000 standard were released. They provide a more customer focused, less complex approach. Daniels worked up guidelines on where to focus updates to comply with the 2008 revision. Worrest also assisted BTM to capture its procedures and data collection to develop a manual to maintain and continue improvements.

"They reviewed materials and everything in between for assembly, inspection, etc., helping make sure processes are compliant with the ISO 9001:2008 standard," Randy said.

Overcoming Challenges

In addition to re-orienting for the updated standard, the company overcame several unexpected challenges along the way. Former co-owner Rick Hixon dissolved his interest in the firm and his role as management representative in the project to focus on his ministry; despite the change, he graciously participated in final audit interviews. Production cutbacks caused by the economic downturn prompted a short company shut-down in early 2009, but BTM rallied quickly, and Worrest was able to resume coaching on the audit process.

"Kreg was so patient; otherwise we wouldn't have gotten here," according to Foster, who noted that everyone gets so busy they don't always follow through, and it's hard for a small company to ride herd on them. "But Kreg was always right there. He does what he says he's go-

ing to do. I feel good about this project."

Worrest helped identify ANAB [ANSI-ASQ National Accreditation Board accredited] registrars that BTM could select from to perform the registration audit. He also participated in the registrar's pre-assessment audit that would help ensure that systems could be ready for the registrar's on-site visit to the plant for the final registration audit.

Important Systems in Place

"We implemented quite a few things that are important," Randy said. A paper trail now exists for what is coming in and where it's going; everything that goes out has an inspection sheet showing who made it and when it was made. If a customer has questions, BTM can backtrack to where the material came from and who was involved [in the process]. They now know what areas are critical to monitor, the ones that are more apt to deviate. Randy said he particularly values the improvements in product identification and traceability that resulted from the ISO processes.

"It takes a bit of work. We couldn't

have done it without Kreg. He really understands how to put the information on paper very well and can really organize thoughts; he is a go-getter and will find the person who knows the procedures; then help them to document what they do."

The quality system is helping them measure things like scrap rate and on-time delivery. Staff now track all the critical things they do to ensure quality. The current Quality Manager, Levi Jones, attended an MMEC ISO Internal Quality Auditor Workshop and indicated that he is especially proud of the quality manual BTM has put together.

"October will be the proof in the pudding," Randy said. That's when an auditor from Perry Johnson Registrars, Inc. will return to the company to see that records are being maintained, corrective actions are done as described and that the system is working the way it should.

Manufacturing Important to the Economy

BTM invested more than \$30,000 in both processes and facilities, including improvements to the administrative

and design space. Production is already up from increased sales. What's more, a key customer has invested in an expensive product qualification test for the stamped raw nut that BTM makes for them, which Randy said demonstrates just how much the customer values BTM's commitment to attaining ISO registration. That complex nut undergoes more value-added steps at the customer plant before being sold to an aerospace prime.

As a result of implementing a quality system, BTM expects \$150,000 in increased sales, \$250,000 in retained sales, creation of two new jobs and two retained jobs, and new opportunities to bid on profitable work. Those outcomes will have a big impact on the local community.

When asked why manufacture from a rural location like Stevensville, Randy noted, "Overnight shipping allows manufacturers to do things from about anywhere. We like the small town environment. I can walk into the bank and its 'Hi, Randy; I saw your picture in the paper the other day.' And we raised our family here."

Resolving Conflict: Dealing With a Difficult Behavior



Bryan Peterson

No matter how great a workplace we cultivate, we are going to encounter an employee with a problem behavior at some point or another. Dealing with this conflict is uncomfortable for many of us, and sticking our head in the sand and "hoping" this employee will change typically does not make things any better. Here are some tips that may help you productively deal with the behavior situation:

- Listen attentively and reflectively— Give the other person an opportunity to tell his or her side of the conversation. Do not mentally prepare your rebuttal while the employee is speaking. Relax and listen using effective listening skills.
- Talk directly— Talk directly to the person with whom you have the issue. Do not complain to everyone else.
- Choose a good time— Plan the right time and allow enough time for the meeting. It is usually not good to try to have this meeting as you or the employee are getting ready to leave for the day. Try to talk in as quiet a place as possible.
- Plan ahead and be specific— Think about what you want to

say ahead of time. Do not memorize what you want to say, but have some notes written down to keep the direction of the conversation moving forward. State to the employee clearly what the problem is and how it affects you.

Conversations about difficult observed behaviors are not easy. Have the respect and courtesy to speak to someone early when you begin to witness behaviors. This will ensure behaviors are discussed before they become out of hand and will lead to a more professional, courteous, and respectful work environment.

Bryan A. Peterson is the Training & Development Staff Consultant with Associated Employers in Billings, Montana, a private Employers Association that provides Business and Human Resources expertise to its members. To learn more, please visit us at www.associatedemployers.org

More of Bryan Peterson's tips on this important topic are available in MMEC's electronic Forward Focus News Service. If you are not receiving the web-based Forward Focus in your email (5 times each year), you can subscribe FREE at <http://members.questline.com/Guestasp?accountID=4540>

Manufacturing News Across Montana

Montana DOC Workforce Grants for New and Existing Workers

The **Montana Department of Commerce** has grant funds available targeted to workforce training projects that can demonstrate tangible, measurable results involving full-time employees. A special review committee may award grants to primary sector businesses that provide education or skills-based training for new and existing employees. Applicants must meet specific criteria. Guidelines, applications and more available at

<http://www.mtfinanceonline.com/WorkForceGrnts.asp>. Commerce recommends that potential applicants contact the Department directly for guidance and funding availability before submitting a formal application. Call Nancy Guccione at 406-841-2744 or email nguccione@mt.gov

Lattice Materials, LLC Receives ISO Registration

Lattice Materials, a Bozeman-based business for more than 20 years, announced in January that its quality management system has been certified to be compliant with the ISO 9001:2008 Quality Standard. A nationwide leader in growing specialty silicon and germanium crystals, Lattice also manufactures parts for infrared optics, laser mirrors and thin film coating applications.

<http://www.latticematerials.com>

Flathead Lake Winery Graduates to Own Facility

After six years at Mission Mountain Food Enterprise (MMFE), **Flathead Lake Winery** has built its own facility along the North Fork of the Flathead River, 8.6 miles north of Columbia Falls on MT Highway 486. The new facility is approximately 1600 sq ft and capable of producing 5000 cases of wine per year. Tastings are available at its facility.

For information call 406-387-WINO (9466) or 406-249-9178.

More information at www.flatheadlakewinery.com.

West Paw Design Doubling Facility; Re-using Construction Materials

Eco-friendly construction more than ten years ago is paying off now as it enables **West Paw Design**, an EcoStar award-winning pet bed and pet toy manufacturer in Bozeman, to double the size of its manufacturing facility by reusing construction materials without adding tons of debris to the landfill. "Despite the sour economy, West Paw is doing well enough to embark on a \$1.8 million expansion, doubling the size of its facility to about 31,000 square feet. Most of the added space will be on the production floor." Read more in Amanda Ricker's article in the *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*

<http://bozemandailychronicle.com/articles/2010/01/21/news/000westpaw.txt>



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Global Market (cont. from page 2)

grow in the global marketplace. Using an advanced training approach, six to eight companies would come together in a collaborative working group environment with a cadre of experts and organizations, learn from each other, overcome obstacles and create an actionable strategic international growth plan for each company. We will soon have more information about ExportTech.

Stay tuned,



Steve Holland, MMEC Director

Selected Challenges for Small Business to Develop Export Markets

Market Access, Trade Agreements, Barriers and Regulation

- Intellectual property and trademark protection
- Duties, taxes, tariffs and legalities
- Trade agreement enforcement

Business environment & innovation

- Shipping costs and regulations
- Financing, credit & payment terms
- Regulatory restrictions
- Currency fluctuations
- Company resources
- Maintaining competitiveness
- Lack of experience & knowledge

Business education, support & services

- Market research
- Branding of services for foreign markets
- Finding Markets/Buyers
- Education about markets
- Licensing in foreign markets
- Developing contacts and relationships
- Learning about and connecting with US government export services
- Finding new growing regions
- Language and word barriers
- Identification, evaluation and vetting of sales representatives & distributors
- Help selling in foreign markets

PDM Opens New Facility Specializing in Value Based Plastic Parts Sourcing



Plastic Design & Manufacturing (PDM) has opened a new, state-of-the-art factory in Manhattan, a locale in beautiful southwest Montana, for plastic injection molding, assemblies, and research and development into plastic related engineering, recycling, and bio-based materials programs. The new location provides easy access shipping and receiving via Interstate 90 and Seattle port. The facility is shared with Quake Industries, a long-time Belgrade plastics injection molding company that specializes in the manufacturing of products in

the shooting sports industry with a worldwide distribution. PDM was started in 1998 to develop turn-key manufacturing programs and outdoor products for the camping, FEMA, and military markets. The growth of the company and its close ties to familial business, Venture Plastics Inc. of Newton Falls, Ohio and El Paso, Texas, lead to the development of this new factory which offers lowest cost pricing, utilizing off-shore and domestic sources for tooling, and metal inserts along with locally produced plastic parts and product assemblies to World Class Standards.

Lean Manufacturing workshops offered in Missoula and Helena during March

During tough financial times, adopting lean manufacturing techniques can put your company in a better position as the economy bounces back. Lean manufacturing techniques can reduce waste by cutting down on such things as overproduction and overstocked inventories, reducing clutter, realigning production flow and streamlining front office procedures. These changes can often be implemented without spending significant capital which frees up money for other purposes.

The Montana Manufacturing Extension Center is offering a full-day workshop on lean manufacturing techniques in three locations in early March to help businesses be better prepared for the economic recovery. A fourth offering will be in Bozeman in late April.

The March events will take place in Hamilton on March 2 at the Bitterroot River Inn; in Missoula on March 3 at the Wingate Inn near the airport and in Helena on March 12 at the Montana Department of Commerce building. Each event runs from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Participants must register in advance at the MMEC Web site www.mtmanufacturingcenter.com. Look for scheduled training in the Training menu.

This fun, fast-paced workshop includes a live factory simulation to demonstrate the results of using lean methods. Registration fee is \$195 per person, and lunch will be provided. For more information, call the MMEC, an outreach center in the MSU College of Engineering, at 406-994-3812.

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MMEC LEAN Manufacturing

Workshop & Simulation

“THREE LOCATIONS IN MARCH”

March 2-Hamilton; March 3-Missoula; March 12-Helena; April 28-Bozeman. 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Improve on-time delivery; reduce defects and WIP; gain participatory decision making, better use of floor space and much more in this powerful workshop. Practice what you learn in a live simulated factory and meet Buzz from Buzz Electronics. \$195 per person. Register online at http://www.mtmanufacturingcenter.com/Training/scheduled_training.htm or call 406-994-4507.

Supervisor Boot Camp at MSU – March 3-4 – Bozeman

A two-day workshop helps new supervisors, business owners and experienced personnel managers learn to increase team effectiveness; 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. both days. Sponsored by MSU Extended University and Montana Manufacturing Extension Center. Effective techniques for supervisors: time and stress management; methods to inspire and coach; identifying and maximizing a personal leadership style, etc. Instructor: Paul Bentley, member of Extended University's Leadership Program. Select course title and look for the special MMEC discount fee listing at <https://btc.montana.edu/secure/pccharge/CEregister.aspx?NC=30>. For more information, call (406) 994-6683.

Legal Reform Conference –

March 22 & 23 – Billings

The Montana Chamber of Commerce is hosting a “Legal Reform Conference” in Billings on March 22 & 23 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel. Pre-registration required: fee for Montana Chamber members \$75; non-members \$100; attorneys

getting CLE credits \$125. To register, contact Jon at the Montana Chamber office (406) 442-2405, ext. 104 or jon@montanachamber.com.

Made In Montana Marketplace – March 26-27 – Great Falls, MT Great Falls Civic Center

2010 Made in Montana Marketplace www.greatfallsmt.net/events/madeinmontana – the premier venue where producers of Made in Montana products and wholesale buyers do business. The event, presented by the City of Great Falls and the Montana Department of Commerce, will be held in the Mansfield Convention Center and Missouri Room of the Great Falls Civic Center. The annual two-day show offers 127 exhibitor booths and more than 300 buyers. The trade show is open to the public on the final day, March 27. For more information, call (406) 455-8510.

MWTC to Lead International Business Development Mission to Israel – End of May

Montana World Trade Center at the University of Montana is making plans to lead an international business development mission to Israel at the end of May. The contingent will include an elected public official. Please contact Megan Harrington (406.243.5850, megan@mwtc.org) <http://www.mwtc.org> to learn more and how your business can take advantage of this unique opportunity. To help you get started, go to http://www.buyusa.gov/israel/en/best_prospects.html to review “Best Prospects Industry Sectors in Israel for U.S. Exporters”.