

Group programs deliver big benefits

Crate deal signed

CHEP has announced a six-year service agreement with Woolworths. Under the agreement, Chep will supply and manage its specially designed collapsible produce crates to Woolworths' vendors who will provide produce packed in the new crates to Woolworths supermarkets across Australia and NZ. According to Chep, the agreement is the largest in the company's history in the Asia-Pacific region and covers the supply, tracking, retrieval and inspection of used crates, and the repairing, washing and relocating of the crates for their next use. The reusable, returnable crates will carry produce from farm to supermarket shelves.

\$\$\$ for clever clothing

CSIRO has received \$4.4m funding to develop ordinary looking clothing that allows electronic devices to operate simply by plugging them in to it. CSIRO's Flexible Integrated Energy Device (FIED) was one of eight proposals selected as part of the latest round of Defence Capability and Technology Demonstrator (CTD) Program. It is envisaged the technology would be incorporated into a piece of clothing and would comprise three components: advanced, conductive fabrics as part of the battery, vibration energy harvesting device and a rectifier/power management system to power soldiers' electronic equipment. As the person wearing the garment moves, the vibrations they create can be harvested and channelled into recharging the battery or powering plug-in electronic device or devices.

Ludowici expands north

LUDOWICI Mineral Processing Equipment has opened its new manufacturing facilities in Brisbane. Located at Northgate, near the international airport, the facilities will be the new manufacturing hub for Ludowici's range of polyurethane and wedge wire components including cyclone parts, wear components, pipe linings and wedge wire baskets.

Jointing companies join up

AN alliance has been signed between bolt tensioning specialists Technofast Industries and fluid and gas sealing experts Klinger Limited to facilitate a complete jointing solution for heavy maintenance projects. The jointing procedure used by Klinger and Technofast involves hydraulic tensioning of multiple stud bolts in unison to ensure that even pressure is applied around the flange while the nuts are tightened, thereby eliminating leaks.

BY HARTLEY HENDERSON

IN Victoria, three inter-related organisations are facilitating improvements for participating manufacturers, and impressive results are being achieved.

Insights to Excellence (i2e) Ltd is a not-for-profit organisation which runs the Innovation Insights program on behalf of the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, and has developed strong collaborative relationships with the Manufacturing Best Practice Program (MBPP) and the High Performance Consortium (HPC).

Over 5,000 participants in the Innovation Insights program have benefited from more than 300 visits to participating companies to view achievements and suggest opportunities for further improvement. Various techniques are utilised including lean manufacturing, continuous improvement, quality improvement, supply chain management, and sustainable development.

Main focus of the MBPP is on the development of tomorrow's manufacturing leaders by giving individuals the confidence to implement change in their workplace and develop the skills and experience to decide the best approach for leading excellence within their organisation.

Director Ian Young says a new direction for MBPP in 2007 has been the launch of the Lean to Green Program. "Developing the sustainable organisation is the next challenge beyond lean manufacturing, with an increasing focus on the triple bottom line," he said.

The MBPP also provides a link between i2e and the HPC. According to the co-founder of HPC, Hugh O'Donnell, HPC's mission is to facilitate the development of non-competing high potential manufacturing enterprises toward world class performance by collaborating together and learning from each other.

Key activities range from a CEO forum and consortium learning days, to diagnostic, benchmarking and special network action project (SNAP) teams.

"Initiated by the Victorian Government about five years ago, the HPC is now self-funded by members, who must meet certain entry criteria such as operational excellence, outstanding product innovation or good export performance.

"Big gains have been achieved through involvement in the program, with one company improving productivity by 50% in a year, and another growing its workforce from 120 to 350 employees in four years,"

O'Donnell told *Manufacturers' Monthly*.

Examples of successes

There are several examples of companies that participate in all three programs (i2e, MBPP, and HPC) including Volgren Australia and Air Radiators.

Volgren Australia manufactures 400 city buses per year at its plants in Melbourne, Perth and Brisbane, and has a current contract to re-build the Perth fleet of 800 buses. Kits are also exported for assembly by licensed builders in Singapore and Malaysia, and a factory is currently being built in the United Arab Emirates.



Volgren Australia's involvement in the programs is helping the company gain the involvement of staff to reduce waste, and in turn reduce the weight of its buses.

Volgren's MD, Peter Dale, says significant benefits are flowing from involvement in the three improvement programs, but it's important to understand that you only get out of them what you put in.

"The co-operative non-competitive nature of the programs means that people are more prepared to open up about the operations of their company, which in turn can mean valuable feedback from fellow members.

"In the Innovation Insights program, people at various organisational levels get to see world class practices by companies in other industries in their own backyard," Dale told *Manufacturers' Monthly*.

"The Lean to Green program reflects the new wave of sustainability that is starting to sweep through the higher levels of management, and is helping to gain the deep involvement of staff in action to reduce waste.

"For example, we are looking at ways to reduce the weight of our buses which in turn will mean reduced energy consumption and costs, a stronger and more viable business, and benefits for the environment.

"We also intend to become self sufficient in water through a range of initiatives including utilisation of our large roof area to harvest rainwater, and the use of recycled water for product wash-down.

"The CEO forums segment of the HPC program is also providing substantial benefits through the roundtable format where common issues can be discussed in a non-competitive environment, and where each member is required to create a one page plan for the next four years on how to improve their company.

"This not only helps to provide an insight into other business practices,

but also helps you to understand your own business better," Dale said.

According to Richard Hamilton, operations manager at Air Radiators in Lara, near Geelong, the company is also reaping big benefits from participation in the three programs, including from a recent HPC project at its plant that focussed on eliminating waste in single pieces flow.

"This is an area where we did not have the necessary in-house skills to analyse processes and make improvements.

"The HPC program members provided the ability to look at the problem in different ways, and we are delighted that productivity improvements of up to 20% are expected to flow from the project, as well as benefits in product quality," Hamilton said.

"Air Radiators has also hosted a plant tour for the Innovation Insights program which arranges visits to companies that excel in one or more areas of their business.

"The program enables participants to learn and assist each other through the swapping of ideas relating to real life activities and issues," Hamilton said.