

For Immediate Release
December 8, 2004

For More Information Contact:
Maria Alfano
(321) 939-4000

Naples Company Finds Lean Manufacturing Profitable

NAPLES – The Thomas Riley Artisans’ Guild is one of the best-known and respected companies in southwest Florida, but there’s still always room for improvement, especially when it comes to moving the company in the direction of Lean Manufacturing.

“Our overall goal was to increase output while eliminating defects,” said Matt Riley, director of client relations for the Naples-based company that was incorporated by his father, Thomas, in 1991.

“We had started to move toward Lean Manufacturing,” the younger Riley said, “but we knew we needed to bring in experts to help us through the entire process.”

That’s where the Florida Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) came in.

“The Florida MEP project managers are quite familiar with Lean Manufacturing and are more than willing to work with companies of all sizes throughout Florida,” said Maria Alfano, director of operations for the Florida MEP.

“We are especially pleased when we can assist a company with such high professional standards as the Artisans’ Guild,” said Alfano.

The Thomas Riley Artisan’s Guild is described as a premier manufacturing company for luxury residential homes, high-end interior designers, preferred architects, and general contractors. It includes a collection of master craftsmen and artisans that offer custom millwork, fine decorative finishes and what Matt Riley calls “monumental quality craftsmanship and white-glove service.”

The 70 employees at the company use Old World techniques and state-of-the-art technology to create superior interior creations for an impressive list of clients that includes well-known personalities and some of the wealthiest people in the world.

“We had a couple specific areas in which we needed assistance from the MEP,” Riley said. “First, we wanted each of our team members to adopt Lean thinking so they could understand how their actions impact the overall process.”

“Second, out of the desire to please our clients we often gave services away, so we needed a system to capture payment for the extra work our craftspeople often end up doing while engineering a project and while working on jobsites,” he added.

It sounds like a simple problem, but the company had no intention of offending its clients while implementing new procedures.

“We wanted to find a way for our artisans to do what they do best,” Riley said, “but we had to make them understand they can’t spend their entire life on one project. The work must be completed within the allotted schedule. That’s why we have an estimating department.”

MEP project managers conducted a series of workshops to assist the artisans in understanding Lean Manufacturing and learning how to deal with clients while on the job.

“We have no intention of saying ‘no’ to any client,” Riley was quick to point out, “but we need our artisans and engineers to track any changes so we can be fairly compensated for additional labor.”

Riley said the MEP project managers made it easy to make the changes. “They were professional, down-to-earth individuals who got along great with our artisans and made things easy to understand for everyone,” he said.

“I was impressed with the work they did and would certainly recommend the Florida MEP to any manufacturer looking for help in introducing Lean techniques,” Riley added.

“These are the type of testimonials we enjoy hearing,” said the MEP’S Alfano. “It is always rewarding for our project managers to work with company officials open to suggestions on improvements and Lean Manufacturing.

“In this case, the company has implemented new policies, improved systems and communication and has reported immediate and positive results,” she added.

“This process really works,” Matt Riley said of MEP’s assistance. “I was especially impressed because we are a totally custom shop and everything is done on a case-to-case basis, but the MEP catered the program to us.”

The Florida MEP is an affiliate of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) under the U.S. Department of Commerce. The national MEP is a network of manufacturing extension centers that provide business and technical assistance to smaller

manufacturers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Through MEP, manufacturers have access to more than 2000 manufacturing and business “coaches” whose job is to help firms make changes that lead to greater productivity, increased profits, and enhanced global competitiveness. For more information on the Florida MEP program call 321-939-4000.