IMPACT

Georgia Tech

Assistance Program Faces Major Cut

Last year when Flexsteel Industries wanted to expand its manufacturing and warehouse space by 56,000 square feet, it asked Georgia Tech's Economic Development Institute (EDI) for help with a revised plant layout.

Staff visited the **Dublin** facility, which makes high-end residential and recreational furniture, and examined space utilization, work flow, processes, material handling and shipping. The EDI team determined how the firm could minimize materials inventory, improve storage and give the plant a "lean" flow.

Implementing EDI's recommendations already has resulted in cost savings and creation of at least 20 jobs. Also, management estimates sales will increase by 28 percent.

This assistance represents a long tradition of Georgia Tech effectively helping industry statewide become more competitive and productive, efforts that for the past decade have been bolstered by the federally funded Manufacturing

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Flexsteel employees work on the company's production line in Dublin.

Extension Partnership (MEP). From fourth quarter 2002 through third quarter 2003, EDI clients assisted through this program realized a total of $10,432,000 in increased sales and $25,808,700 in cost savings. For the same period, 474 jobs were created and 556 retained.

The MEP program, operating in all 50 states through the U.S. Commerce Department, faces a 63 percent budget cut that would considerably reduce, if not eliminate, many services provided to domestic industry already struggling against foreign competition. EDI expects to receive a $1.7 million annual cut in MEP funds starting July 1, 2004. This loss will require EDI to make reductions in staff and offices.

A strong advocacy effort is under way to urge Congress to restore funding in FY 05; however, the President's FY 05 budget request recommends only $39.2 million for MEP. **www.edi.gatech.edu/articles/articlesans.cfm?ID=161**

Fowl's Fair

For 30 years, Georgia Tech has worked closely with the state's poultry industry, and the results of that relationship are many. Early efforts fostered the university's Agricultural Technology Research Program (ATRP), now one of the top programs of its kind in the country. This summer it will have a new home on campus—the $9.4 million Food Processing Technology Building, funded in part by corporate donors, particularly the poultry industry.

Research related to ATRP has involved noise abatement in poultry processing plants, automation of poultry inspection, water conservation in rinse cycles, wastewater disinfection, poultry packing, pathogen detection, deboning meat, and computerized information retrieval.

In FY 03, ATRP engineers provided 26 technical assists to firms and individuals across the state. Licensing agreements were signed with three firms and collaborative agreements signed with two others. In addition, many technological advances in imaging, robotics, sensors and other areas, while often designed with poultry applications in mind, eventually could find use in other food-processing industries. **www.atrp.gatech.edu**

Entrepreneurs Resource Center Launched

To share its resources and expertise with an audience beyond its own member companies, the Advanced Technology Development Center (ATDC) has launched an Entrepreneurs Resource Center (ERC) that includes both a broad range of online resources and a new facility at its Fifth Street headquarters.

Information available online includes resources on starting up and building a company, researching the market, developing a technology product, generating sales, financing and raising money, marketing, hiring the right people, and handling legal issues. The site also includes summary descriptions and links to useful publications.

The physical center at 75 Fifth Street includes directories and other materials not available online.

Though the ERC is primarily oriented toward entrepreneurs starting up technology companies, many of the resources relate to entrepreneurship in general. **www.atdc.org/erc/**

Courses to Follow

More than two dozen people attended a Georgia Tech Procurement Assistance Center (GTPAC) course, "Marketing to State and Local Governments," in January.

The course is one of 32 scheduled to be given at EDI's Midtown **Atlanta** Technology Square location this year and one of at least 60 expected to be offered across the state, from **Albany** to **Augusta**.

These no-cost GTPAC classes not only help small Georgia firms compete for government contracts, they also acquaint the center's clients with other relevant EDI services—such as new product development, trade adjustment assistance and ISO 9000 certification—that can help them become more competitive and successful. GTPAC helped Georgia firms win more than $215 million in government contracts last year. **www.edi.gatech.edu/gtpac**

Minority Business Gets New Support

Georgia Tech's Economic Development Institute (EDI) has been awarded a cooperative agreement from the U.S. Department of Commerce to manage the Georgia Minority Business Development Center (GMBDC). The new center will provide business and technical assistance to minority entrepreneurs in Georgia, helping them access capital, improve business operations and grow both revenue and jobs.

The GMBDC is part of a new federal strategic direction that will focus resources on the 16 to 20 percent of minority firms responsible for more than 90 percent of the revenue and jobs generated by U.S. minority-owned companies. This means GMBDC will concentrate its efforts on firms with annual sales exceeding $500,000 and having rapid growth potential or the capability of generating significant employment. **www.georgiambdc.org/**

Encouraging Entrepreneurship

In early February, 64 people participated in a two-and-a-half-day EDI workshop, "Energizing Entrepreneurs," in **Atlanta**. Attendees included 27 Georgia community representatives as well as Georgia Department of Industry, Trade and Tourism program managers and regional staff. Don Macke of the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship led the program in which participants gained a better understanding of entrepreneurs and learned how their communities can support entrepreneurial efforts.

Gov. Sonny Perdue held a second annual "entrepreneur summit" during the event where he announced formation of the Georgia Entrepreneur and Small Business Coordinating Network. It will make recommendations to improve the support of minority business start-ups, rural and agriculture-focused entrepreneurs, entrepreneur education in the state's school systems and community small-business assistance. The network will comprise local entrepreneurs, small-business owners, non-profit support groups and representatives from relevant state agencies.

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GDITT Commissioner Glenn Cornell.

Around the State

■ When Macon Plastics wanted to upgrade its scheduling system, it contacted EDI for help. First, specialists in lean manufacturing recommended process improvements, then information technology experts devised a new system for tracking orders. Sales at the **Macon** pipe fittings firm have since risen by 26 percent and work-in-process has been cut by more than 50 percent.

■ Jebco, a contract metal fabricator producing mail boxes, grills, tent poles and other products, saw quality as an increasingly important issue and sought assistance from EDI. Quality specialists helped the **Warrenton** firm gain ISO 9000 certification, which helped cement customer relationships and boost productivity.

■ Last year, EDI staff conducted technology opportunity assessments for 13 counties in northeast Georgia to see how and where application of information technology could foster economic development. To date, the efforts have resulted in formation of the Lake Lanier Technology Alliance in **Hall County**, a technology leadership program in **Lumpkin County** and demonstration of the tourism-related Visitor Internet Point in **Rabun County**.

Georgia Tech's Regional Office Network

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Athens	706.542.8900	**Gainesville**	770.531.4550
Augusta	706.737.1414	**Griffin**	770.254.7592
Brunswick	912.634.4860	**Macon**	478.751.6190
Cartersville	770.387.4002	**Newnan**	770.254.7592
Columbus	706.649.1661	**Rome**	706.295.6008
Dalton	706.272.2702	**Savannah**	912.963.2509
Douglas	912.389.4717	**Warner Robins**	478.953.3155