

THE ROLLA DAILY NEWS

Missouri Enterprise: primed for manufacturing success

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Business has always been about vision, capital, risk, markets and growth and in economic downturns, survival. It's rare when one person or organization has all the answers to get to the next step. Rolla is fortunate to have the Missouri Enterprise, an organization based in Rolla at Missouri S&T's Technology Development Center, whose very existence depends on finding solutions to manufacturer's questions.

On a drive down Hwy 63 South, passing through Westphalia, Freeburg, Vienna, Vichy and into Rolla you'll see new local businesses and manufacturing business expansion. It's off the beaten path compared to those businesses that spring up in the I-44 corridor, but this is where you find dreams and some jobs to sustain those small communities. Business has always been about vision, capital, risk, markets and growth and in economic downturns, survival. It's rare when one person or organization has all the answers to get to the next step. Rolla is fortunate to have the Missouri Enterprise, an organization based in Rolla at Missouri S&T's Technology Development Center, whose very existence depends on finding solutions to manufacturer's questions.

"Skilled people are harder and harder to find, and getting them to stay on board and grow with my company is even harder," lamented one manufacturer. Another said, "There must be better ways to control energy costs." Those questions and many others are what Missouri Enterprise CEO and President Dusty Cruise hears many times over. That's why this unique group of business professionals focus on business growth, continuous improvement in manufacturing, supplier development and work force issues.

While it is now a state-wide consulting business, it started in 1983 in association at the time with the University of Missouri-Rolla. Now, though still associated with Missouri S&T, they are a network with business managers scattered in regions throughout the state and they are making a big impact. For the last quarter of 2017, the Missouri Enterprise helped Mo. manufacturers create or retain 10,060 jobs, helped to create new investments valued at \$494,421,249, charted \$1,246,376,108 in increased or retained sales and racked up \$189,762,532 in cost savings.

According to CEO Cruise, 90 to 95 percent of this success is accomplished with the Missouri Enterprise staff. Very little is outsourced to third-parties. “We visit a lot of companies and we learn from them,” he said, though most of the staff individually have over 20 years of manufacturing management.

“When we started, the university had the wisdom and understanding to realize the need for economic development and a real live touch in the world to help manufacturers as well as creating an asset for the university,” said Cruise.

Chairman of the Board Steve Bowles, said Missouri Enterprise (known at the time as Missouri Incutech) was considered an arm of the university. It was actually an outreach Extension program. “It was then funded about 100 percent by the federal and state government and now its just the opposite,” explained Bowles. Missouri Enterprise is still financed with funding from the Department of Commerce and some state money but it is for the most part, self sustaining with service contracts, tackling such topics as leadership training, product design, AS9100 migration and supply chain improvement.

“We have our own P and L (profit and loss statement) so there is no financial obligation to the university,” said Cruise.

Cruise and Bowles are bullish on the future of manufacturing in our area, but they know it is a long process to see that translated into jobs. Cruise points to the innovation incubators in St. Louis for the interest in new startups.

“There’s just a whole new mindset—startups are hitting a record,” he said. “When these new things come up, it fosters “The Internet of Things,” it moves that technology into something that’s already existing.”

So how come many people don't seem to know about Missouri Enterprise or their presence in Rolla? CEO Cruise admits they have an identity crisis. There is a "Missouri Enterprise" in every state in the Union and Puerto Rico, obviously under different names, but they all do the same things, supported by the Department of Commerce and client fees.

If jobs are what Americans need, this organization could play a bigger part in job creation and retention as shown by their current job numbers, investment value, sales and cost savings for existing manufacturers. Cruise's long view is that success breeds success and Missouri Enterprise will be here when it happens to help those businesses reach the next growth plateau.



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