



INSIGHT FROM ...

MANNY VASQUEZ, director of existing industry services for the Fox Cities Regional Partnership

Human services meets productivity

Contract manufacturing plays an important role in the Fox Cities economy

In this day and age when international competition keeps rising and the U.S. economy is just getting back on its feet, local economic growth is a challenge best tackled through cooperation. To that end, the Fox Cities Regional Partnership was established as an affiliate of the Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce in 2012 to stimulate regional economic growth within its service area of Outagamie, Calumet and northern Winnebago counties. Specifically, the partnership's goal is to support the creation of 1,200 new primary jobs by the end of 2017, which, according to the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, would generate a \$141 million annual boost to the Fox Cities economy.

Because of their critical importance to the local economy, the Fox Cities Regional Partnership works with primary employers, defined as those that derive the majority of their revenue from the sale of products or services outside the Fox Cities region. Incoming dollars resulting from those sales help support local retail, service and professional sectors, whose health and vitality are also essential. The work of the Fox Cities Regional Partnership is focused around two specific programs: existing industry retention/expansion, and industry attraction. Through the retention program, partnership staff and volunteers visit area primary employers regularly in an effort to help them identify challenges and opportunities and connect them with solutions. Of the more than 100 companies that have opened their doors to the partnership, three are contract manufacturers: Lakeside Packaging Plus, Valley Packaging Industries and STEP Industries.

The economic impact that these three manufacturers have in our region is clearly identified by the size of their combined workforce, which can reach almost 1,000 employees during peak seasons. Their role in helping other Fox Cities primary employers meet their purchase orders and maintain productivity, by providing cost-effective

and reliable contract manufacturing services, is crucial. This regional private sector collaboration contributes to the success of the Fox Cities Regional Partnership and its mission to help our existing primary employers become more competitive, grow stronger and ultimately create more jobs. Further, the well-established presence of contract manufacturing can be a draw for future companies that may be interested in contracting those services locally.

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Contract manufacturing involves outsourcing production to third-party vendors. This basic working model translates well into different types of industries and reduces companies' production costs. By contracting out labor-intensive projects to third-party sites, client companies do not have to rent, purchase or maintain manufacturing facilities, buy equipment or hire and train employees in order to produce their finished goods. Contract manufacturers also tend to have lower labor costs, but at the same time, work closely with their customers – as well as regulatory agencies – to ensure output meets high quality control and other mandatory standards.

On the web

- » Lakeside Packaging Plus, Inc.
www.lakesidepackagingplus.com
- » Valley Packaging Industries, Inc.
www.vpind.com
- » STEP Industries, Inc.
www.stepindustries.com

Between its two facilities in Neenah and Oshkosh, Lakeside Packaging Plus, Inc. has more than 90,000 square feet of production space. In addition to offering expert fulfillment, assembly, warehousing, shipping and other services, LPP is a 501c(3) corporation, providing employment and day service activities to adults with diagnosed developmental disabilities including cerebral palsy, brain injury, cognitive disabilities or mental illnesses. After 51 years in business, companies continue to use LPP's motivated and disciplined workforce to supplement their own labor pool for jobs requiring large amounts of hand labor, rush-order jobs and jobs not compatible with their

normal production set-ups.

Like LPP, Valley Packaging Industries, Inc. is a contract manufacturer focused on promoting the dignity of individuals with disabilities – mental and physical – and other employment barriers. Established in 1956, VPI is a community rehabilitation center that provides work training and employment for 300 to 500 workers annually. VPI has earned a solid reputation by meeting their customers' needs for affordable pricing, workforce flexibility, consistent quality and on-time delivery of their contract packaging and assembly projects. VPI has 500,000 square feet of customizable production and warehouse space and a workforce of more than 800 people to ensure competitive bids and dependable service.

STEP Industries, Inc. of Neenah also offers companies that are short on manpower or production space cost-effective contract manufacturing services including custom packaging, collating and shrink wrapping. Like LPP and VPI, STEP believes in restoring a person's dignity through employment and training. Since

1982, the company has employed more than 9,000 people with alcohol and drug addictions who are looking for a second chance. STEP's contract manufacturing services support its mission to provide vocational rehabilitation and job readiness training to men and women in recovery. Following Good Manufacturing Practices Guidelines, the company is able to assist customers with simple handwork, complex assemblies and machine-packaging operations, all while creating positive social change in the community.

With more than 135 years of combined experience, these large Fox Cities employers offer a manufacturing model in which compassion for adults with employment barriers meets the productivity and results that businesses expect. 🏭

Manny Vasquez is director of existing industry services for the Fox Cities Regional Partnership. He manages the partnership's Existing Industry Retention/Expansion program.

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