

ExporTech program looks to help manufacturers grow

WAUKESHA – As president of a small manufacturing company, **Neil Karolek** knows how important it is to find new areas to sell products.

Karolek said that about 12 years ago his company, TLX Technologies in Waukesha, had four people putting together its products, but it now has 30 employees after business began to grow. However, if the company hoped to grow further, he said it was essential for them to look into new markets.

“We started to hit some walls, and we knew we couldn’t branch out unless we got smarter from a global perspective,” **Karolek** said. “But the thing is you just can’t call FedEx and tell them you want to start exporting. You have to market yourself on a worldwide basis.”

TLX Technologies is starting to see its export business grow after it became one of the first companies in Wisconsin to undergo the ExporTech program and get the resources needed to expand export business.

ExporTech, which is a joint venture between the Wisconsin Manufacturing Extension Partnership and the Wisconsin Department of Commerce Bureau of Export Development, educates small and mid-sized Wisconsin manufacturers on how to export their businesses and the plethora of resources available to them.

Tony Hozeny, communications director for the Department of Commerce, said the department offers staff members to work as a resource for the smaller companies and mentor them on how to export their products. Because the majority of Wisconsin manufacturing companies are small and have less than 500 employees, Hozeny said growing Wisconsin’s exports is important to growing the state economy.

“It may take two to three years to see the results of this,” he said. “But one of the president’s comments was that nationwide we really needed to increase our exports. The base answer to that is to bring together our expertise and help these companies that otherwise might not get into export markets.”

Mike Klonsinski, executive director of WMEP, said the first round of ExporTech was so successful they will be starting a second round in September to help smaller companies reach new markets and compete with dynamic regions of the world where exporting has become essential to fueling foreign economies.

“In the state of Wisconsin, we find that barely one in five are exporting,” Klonsinski said. “All we know is that has got to change.”

Karolek said his company is already seeing its business expand with customers growing in Brazil. And as the company moves forward it hopes to build up a joint venture in China and expand into that market as well.

“If you’re not trying to sell into that market, I think you’re severely limiting your business,” he said.

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