



# Kane County

## KC Jobs Committee

### Agenda

Government Center  
719 S. Batavia Ave., Bldg. A  
Geneva, IL 60134

LEWIS, ALLAN, Bates, Daugherty, Penesis, Strathmann, Young, ex-officios Roth (County Vice Chair) and Pierog (County Chair)

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**Friday, October 17, 2025**

**10:30 AM**

**County Board Room**

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#### **2025 Committee Goals**

- Goals from the July Jobs Committee meeting
- Revise County Code Definition of the Jobs Committee
  - Economic Development Strategic Plan - Begin implementation of the strategies recommenced by the Kane County Economic Development Strategic Plan
  - Regional Partnerships - Continue to work with the Greater Chicagoland Economic Partnership and other regional partners on economic development activities
  - Local Economic Development Programs - Continue to meet the objectives of the active ARPA Programs and Grant Programs while actively seeking new opportunities to enhance current programming
  - Support for Jobs Committee focusing on the Six Priorities
  - Implement the Economic Development Strategic Plan for Kane County
  - Implement approved ARPA projects
    - oKane County Economic Development Organization - Launch
    - oFabulous Fox! Water Trail - Launch sites and marketing
    - oFarmer Grants – staff managed grants to local food farmers
    - oTourism – with CVB's
    - oManufacturing – with IMEC
  - Support the Kane County Economic Development Organization
  - Support County's role in the Greater Chicagoland Economic Partnership
  - Continue to strengthened partnerships with economic development efforts by the State of Illinois, municipalities, chambers of commerce and economic development groups
  - Continue to network and development partnership for the future Hydrogen economy
  - Renew "Made and Kane" series in Kane County Connects featuring companies and products that are made in Kane County
  - Continue to apply for additional outside grants

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- 1. Call To Order**
  - 2. Roll Call**
  - 3. Remote Attendance Requests**
  - 4. Approval of Minutes: September 12, 2025**
  - 5. Public Comment**
-

**6. Jobs Committee Priorities**

- A.** Jobs Committee 2026 Goals Discussion
- B.** Kane County Economic Development Initiatives Staff Updates

**7. Office of Community Reinvestment - Workforce Development Division**

- A.** Workforce Development Division Staff Presentation

**8. New Business****9. Comments by Co-Chair****10. Reports Placed On File****11. Executive Session (if needed)****12. Adjournment**

STATE OF ILLINOIS )

SS.

COUNTY OF KANE )

**PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION NO. TMP-25-1248**

## JOBS COMMITTEE 2026 GOALS DISCUSSION

STATE OF ILLINOIS )

SS.

COUNTY OF KANE )

**PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION NO. TMP-25-1220**

## KANE COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES STAFF UPDATES

# MADE IN KANE.

## 2025 IMEC KANE COUNTY MANUFACTURING GRANT PROGRAM REPORT



**IMEC**   
Plan. Implement. Excel.



## KANE COUNTY MANUFACTURING GRANT PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

- ✓ Projected number of jobs retained due to program\*: 556+
- ✓ Projected number of jobs created due to program\*: 326+
- ✓ All 52 participating companies reported meaningful process improvements
- ✓ Each manufacturer adopted new workforce development practices
- ✓ Many gained access to resources that were otherwise cost-prohibitive
- ✓ 300+ workers were impacted through training or placement
- ✓ The two programs will generate over \$25 million of aggregate impact based on the 2021 survey completed by 90 manufacturers in the county
- ✓ Funds expected to assist at least 60 county manufacturers and their workforce
- ✓ It is estimated the initiative will directly and indirectly affect 1,000 jobs
- ✓ 20 manufacturers selected for Lighthouse Program through application process
- ✓ All Kane County manufacturers were eligible to participate in the Expanding Talent Pipeline program

\*Number based on estimates provided by grant recipients at the start of the program.

## MANUFACTURING IN KANE COUNTY

Employment (2023–2024)

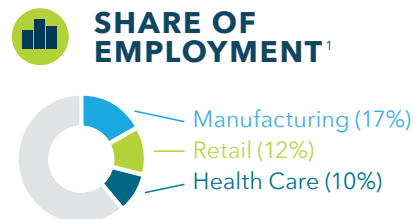
 **191,000**  
JOBS<sup>1</sup>

 **41,428**  
RESIDENTS WORK IN  
MANUFACTURING<sup>2</sup>

 **OVER 700**  
MANUFACTURERS CALL  
KANE COUNTY HOME, 99%  
OF THESE COMPANIES ARE  
LOCAL, FAMILY-OWNED  
SMALL AND MIDSIZE  
ENTERPRISES

 **\$2.17M**  
ANNUAL PAYROLL FOR  
MANUFACTURING<sup>2</sup>


→ The Kane County Economic Development Corporation, launched in 2024, is actively promoting advanced manufacturing and workforce development



 **RANKS 4<sup>TH</sup>**  
IN THE UNITED STATES  
MANUFACTURING GDP<sup>3</sup>

 PEOPLE EMPLOYED  
BY MORE THAN 13K  
MANUFACTURERS  
**574.7K**<sup>1</sup>

 **MANUFACTURING  
PERCENTAGE OF  
WORKFORCE**  
**9.3%**<sup>2</sup>

 **VALUE ADDED TO THE  
ECONOMY COMPRISING  
12.3% OF STATE GDP—**  
**\$135.1B**<sup>1</sup>

 **WORTH OF GOODS  
EXPORTED IN 2023**  
**\$71.8B**<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kane County Market Analysis

<sup>2</sup> DATA USA

<sup>1</sup> National Association of Manufacturers

<sup>2</sup> National Association of Manufacturers  
(based on Federal and State data)

<sup>3</sup> StatsAmerica

## KANE COUNTY MANUFACTURING GRANT PROGRAM

### TOP CHALLENGES: WORKFORCE\*

- ✓ Attract and retain workforce talent
- ✓ Bring more jobs to the area
- ✓ Find qualified candidates
- ✓ Improve hiring procedures
- ✓ Motivate young people with potential
- ✓ Employ local engineers
- ✓ Strengthen leadership abilities and decision-making in ambiguous situations
- ✓ Work smarter, not harder

### TOP CHALLENGES: OPERATIONS\*

- ✓ Increase manufacturing efficiency
- ✓ Increase manufacturing throughput and capacity
- ✓ Expand machining capabilities
- ✓ Improve flow and cleanliness
- ✓ Address inefficiencies to lower manufacturing costs
- ✓ Reduce material and labor waste
- ✓ Improve production efficiency while maintaining high-quality standards
- ✓ Define product line and achieve document consistency
- ✓ Improve quality excellence

\*Challenges shared by grant recipients at the start of the program.



# WELCOME NOTE FROM DAVID BOULAY

## PRESIDENT OF IMEC

Like the land itself, manufacturing in Kane County is plentiful, rich, and thriving. It is a living, breathing ecosystem supporting people and their families, makers and their communities, our country and its future.

Out of the gate, we had a collective mission.

Our goal was to empower manufacturers to become best-in-class. As you'll see in this report, the impact was transformative. IMEC and Kane County helped 52 small and midsize manufacturers address workforce challenges and drive operational improvements. Good starting points on the path to excellence.

On these pages, you'll feel the spirit of American ingenuity. From CNC machinists supporting our national defense to nonprofit organizations expanding manufacturers' workforce pipelines, these stories reveal a broader truth: When manufacturers, educators, public agencies, and nonprofits collaborate, the results transcend what any one entity could possibly achieve.

For manufacturing in the U.S. to scale, small and midsize manufacturers need access to tools and training resources. This is the power of public-private partnership moving manufacturing forward.

For those who don't know us, our story goes back to 1996 as a U.S. Department of Commerce National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) center. Don't let the long name fool you. Our focused mission then continues today: to enable Illinois small and midsize manufacturers to compete on a global stage.

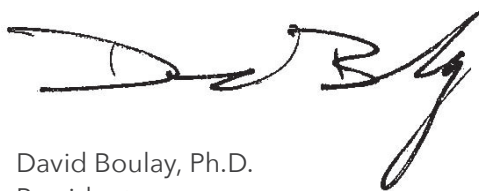
IMEC continues to provide the talent, resources, and, yes, even the playbook for manufacturers. (If you would like to read [Made in Illinois: A Modern Playbook For Manufacturers To Compete And Win](#), let me know. I'll send you a copy!)

We do this through leadership training, automation and technology, operational expertise, and workforce development, assisting more than 3,000 companies in 2025 to date. Yet, there's so much more work to do as Illinois continues to become a mecca for manufacturing innovation. The Kane County Manufacturing Grant Program is living proof.

We commend Kane County, especially the Kane County Board, Board Chair Corinne Pierog, and the Development & Community Services Department led by Mark VanKerkhoff for recognizing that going it alone for manufacturers leaves potential success on the table. Their leadership and early commitment of \$1 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding, along with the behind-the-scenes work of county staff to connect manufacturers and partners, made this initiative possible.

Our task was to show ROI within 12 months. This report, told largely through the manufacturers themselves, reveals how we did it. It also speaks to a new era of economic prosperity, national security, and a global competitiveness through manufacturing.

I'm proud of our commitment to growing manufacturing, building business resilience, improving job security for Illinois families, and inspiring a thriving workforce. Thank you to the leadership of Kane County for helping small to midsize manufacturers navigate the road ahead with the grit and resilience the Prairie State is known for.



David Boulay, Ph.D.  
President  
Illinois Manufacturing Excellence Center



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# SHARED PURPOSE. PROGRESS FORWARD.

## IMAGINING TOGETHER

Silo thinking is a remnant of the past. Today, modern industrial leaders are building a strong future with a strong team. Shifting sands demand it: the rapid evolution of artificial intelligence, supply chain challenges, global uncertainty, workforce shortages, economic volatility, and outdated operations. The maker spirit has never been stronger. The difference today is that those by your side enable you to go boldly forward, further, faster.

## WORKING TOGETHER

The 2021 American Rescue Plan Act was passed to boost economic recovery in a post-COVID-19 world. From these funds, Kane County was awarded a \$1 million grant known as the Kane County Manufacturing Grant Program. The Illinois Manufacturing Excellence Center (IMEC) led the way, addressing operational excellence and workforce challenges head-on. No excuses. No gaps. No wrong turns. Just a shared purpose toward progress. And a straight shot to building a better manufacturing future.

## TRANSFORMING TOGETHER

The manufacturing leaders profiled in this report demonstrate one consistent thread: Public-private partnerships work. There's a reason. No one company has all the experts, all the resources, all the answers.

Together is the new way through.

# PUBLIC-PRIVATE INITIATIVE A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE TO KANE COUNTY MANUFACTURERS

In an oversized garage in an Elgin industrial park, five engineers and machinists at **R&G Springs** manufacture critical components that help keep U.S. fighter jets in the air and satellites in orbit. Their wavy washers and precision spring parts are small, but their impact is anything but. “We build them to meet Department of Defense specifications,” said Mike Hudec, who took over the company from his dad upon his passing 10 years ago. “More importantly, they’re built to matter.”

That spirit of quiet excellence, family pride, and mission-driven manufacturing is the thread running through many of the small and midsize companies that make up the backbone of Kane County’s industrial economy.

It’s also what the unprecedented Kane County Manufacturing Grant Program was designed to strengthen.

Through the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, passed to boost economic recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic, Kane County was awarded a \$1 million grant. **IMEC** was then selected to lead the way in sharpening manufacturer competitiveness.

## CLOSING CRITICAL GAPS

IMEC, along with expert resources, launched a two-part strategy: the Lighthouse Manufacturer Program to drive operational excellence and the Workforce Development Program to address workforce challenges.

The 52 participating small and midsize manufacturers gained tools, resources, and knowledge to close critical gaps in both areas through customized manufacturing grants up to \$50,000 each.

From certifications and quality audits to training, leadership development, and workforce support, the grants met manufacturers where they were and accelerated their potential. Twenty-two from this group had the exclusive opportunity to participate in the Lighthouse Manufacturer Program. These “Lighthouse” factories are now equipped to connect digital transformation with operational, workforce, and productivity enhancements.

## BUILDING LONG-TERM RESILIENCE

The grant program was a bold, million-dollar bet on manufacturers. Where some counties favor short-term recovery, Kane County focused on long-term resilience.

Without public-private grant collaboration, these manufacturers would most likely have fallen behind in the global competitive market by not addressing inefficiencies and creating a roadmap for growth, according to Mark Loscudo, an IMEC Technical Specialist.

For companies like R&G Springs, the timing couldn’t have been better. The firm, founded by Hudec’s parents Roman and Gama, was in the midst of transition. Decades of craftsmanship were now being adapted for digital visibility and new talent pipelines. The company received support to modernize and codify its employee handbook, improve job descriptions, and upgrade its public-facing materials.

“At R&G Springs, we helped a second-generation owner go from doing the work to driving the business,” said Loscudo. “When a tooling setup drops from ten minutes to ten seconds, it’s not just a win for one shop, it’s a signal that small manufacturers can compete globally with precision, speed, and purpose.”

This hands-on, adaptive approach became the program’s hallmark.

For example, the team at **HARTING Americas**, a multinational connector manufacturer also located in Elgin, took on challenges they had never formally tackled, such as navigating the complexities of various management styles and business etiquette across the globe.

“Normally we’d try to patch something together in-house or skip it entirely because of cost,” said Danny Malouf, Regional Director of People Development. “But through this grant, IMEC brought in someone who really knew what they were doing. It wasn’t just a vendor, it was a thought partner who tailored the solution to us. And now we’re deploying that training across the Americas.”

## SCALING BEST PRACTICES

That ability to scale best practices from Kane County to international operations is one of the lesser-known but most powerful outcomes. The tools developed for small to midsize firms are, in many cases, world-class and infinitely replicable.

At **Labels & Specialty Products**, a family-run labeling and print solutions company in St. Charles, grant support helped the team move from reactive to proactive workforce strategies. “It made us pause, invest in our people, and build a better foundation,” said Anita Tyndall, the company’s Production and Scheduling Manager. “For example, we just signed up two employees for IMEC’s leadership program. Before

“The roadmap to growth starts with eliminating waste. Once these manufacturers trust the process and see what’s possible, they stop surviving and start scaling. Kane County’s shop floors are proving grounds for world-class precision and resilience.”

MARK LOSCUDO,  
IMEC TECHNICAL SPECIALIST



this, we wouldn't have even known about it, let alone had the time or resources to participate."

That readiness to grow as a result of practical support is exactly what the program was designed to deliver. In the approximately 8,300-person town of Gilberts, **MDi-co**, a high-precision CNC machining firm that started in a shed, used its grant to achieve ISO 9001 (International Organization for Standardization 9001) certification. The designation opened doors to new defense and aerospace clients, validating years of operational rigor.

Kate Kugelman, MDi-co's Chief Operating Officer, was grateful for how seamlessly support was integrated into the business. "We knew what we were doing, but we didn't know how to wrap it all in ISO language. IMEC's team came on site, saw what we had, and helped close the gaps. She (the IMEC technical specialist) gave me language, structure, and insight. It was invaluable."

IMEC Technical Specialist Margo Barr-Kosier said many small manufacturers, like MDi-co, are tight-knit, mission-driven teams that rely on cross-functional communication and collaboration across the local supply chain.

"When I visit a manufacturer," she said, "one of the first things we do is simplify complex quality systems. In one case, we reduced 400 unused documents to 40 essential ones, eliminating waste and making ISO certification practical and meaningful. This clarity helps small companies pass audits and compete in high-stakes sectors like aerospace and medical devices."

## EXPANDING THE MANUFACTURING WORKFORCE

Yet, while certifications and handbooks may have been the deliverables, the real outcomes were deeper: confidence, credibility, and connection.

Throughout the county, third-party workforce groups and nonprofits played a quiet but essential supporting role. Organizations like the **Fabricators and Manufacturers Association (FMA)**, **Parents Alliance Employment Project**, **Holistic**, and **Little Friends** helped set the stage. By connecting manufacturers with motivated workers, hosting introductory programs to manufacturing careers, and embedding soft-skills training into job placement pipelines, these nonprofits expanded access to talent and reduced hiring friction for local manufacturers.

Summer manufacturing camps, supported by grant funds and facilitated in collaboration with several workforce organizations, offered hands-on exposure to local high schoolers, community college students, and others exploring new careers. "The idea wasn't just to

talk about manufacturing," said Anthony Miser with Little Friends. "It was to put people in the room, in the shop, and say: 'Here's what it's really like, and here's a company that could be your next employer.'"

These connections strengthened an already resilient ecosystem. With just five employees, R&G Springs is contributing to global aerospace systems and the nuclear power industry. HARTING Americas' components power wind turbines, roller coasters, and data centers. Labels & Specialty Products is investing in people-first training systems. And MDi-co is supplying mission-critical parts for national defense. Other manufacturers are also making a mark in their fields.

"The striking thing is how much of this work flies under the radar," said Paola Velasquez, Director of Organizational Culture with IMEC. "These are family businesses. They don't always have a full-time HR department or a communications team. They're building the infrastructure quietly and effectively, which the country depends on."

## KANE COUNTY'S LONG-VIEW MINDSET

Kane County has since committed to additional investments in manufacturing, with new mechanisms in place to continue supporting innovation and workforce development. Mark VanKerkhoff, the county's Director of the **Development & Community Services Department**, said, "This isn't just about recovery. It's about positioning Kane County and Illinois manufacturing to lead, globally."

That long-view mindset is echoed by the manufacturers themselves. "Now when we bring someone new on, they don't just get handed a training binder," said Tyndall at Labels & Specialty Products. "New employees get a coach, a plan, and someone watching their progress. It's a different culture. And it's working."

The grant program didn't create that culture. Rather, it uncovered it, strengthened it, and gave it room to grow. By focusing on people, process, and performance one manufacturer at a time, it became a strategy.

Manufacturers across Kane County transformed by accelerating their potential going forward.



*"We wanted to expose students and adults to the real work of manufacturing, not just the idea of it."*

**SUZIE DAHLKE-BEARD,  
PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT  
SPECIALIST, FABRICATORS  
& MANUFACTURERS  
ASSOCIATION**

# Q&A WITH MARK VANKERHOFF

Director, Development & Community Services Department for Kane County



**Q: Flashback - when did Kane County first realize manufacturing was more than just a background player in its economy?**

**A:** It was about a decade ago, during a bit of a lightbulb moment for the County Board. The chairman at the time, Chris Lauzen, saw parts of the economy that weren't getting enough attention. He created two new committees: one for agriculture and one created as the "Jobs Committee." That Jobs Committee became a pivotal space for championing the manufacturing economy. At first, it was new territory for county government as we realized that not every municipality was paying attention to their manufacturers. But need was clear, as 17% of all Kane County jobs are in manufacturing. That was a wake-up call.



**Q: Fast-forward to the pandemic recovery: How did Kane County decide to use American Rescue Plan Act funds to help manufacturers?**

**A:** When the rescue funds came in, the County Board put out a call to County Board-managed departments: What should we do with this once-in-a-generation opportunity? Many departments pitched solid ideas, including five big economy-related ideas from the Development & Community Services Department. One of those five zeroed in on manufacturing. We didn't reinvent the wheel. We looked at what was working in McHenry and Cook counties. That's how the Lighthouse Program came to life. Partnering with IMEC, we bundled services for local manufacturers and created space for them to learn from one another, peer to peer. It became more than a grant. Now it's becoming a movement.



**Q: Manufacturing is a broad word. What does it look like on the ground in Kane County?**

**A:** It's incredibly diverse. Some of our manufacturers have been around for over a century; others launched just last year. There are family-run shops, private equity-owned companies, and even employee-buyouts where workers saved the business themselves. You'll find operations in food, metals, plastics, aerospace, and everything in between. They don't often make headlines, but they power the local, state, national, and global economies quietly and consistently.



**Q: Were there any hurdles when trying to engage manufacturers in county-led programs?**

**A:** Definitely. Manufacturers aren't always the first to jump into government initiatives. For many, the only contact with local government is through annual fire inspections, so emails from the county? Not exactly a hot item. But once we teamed up with groups like IMEC and VIA ([Valley Industrial Association](#)), things changed. These organizations had the trust and relationships to make real connections happen. That made all the difference.



**Q: Manufacturing faces a talent crunch nationwide. How is Kane County helping fill the workforce pipeline with events like the Skills Work Manufacturing Camps?**

**A:** We're working hard to widen the on-ramps. That means supporting nontraditional workers - individuals on the autism spectrum, adults with disabilities, people who may not follow the high school-to-college pipeline. With groups like Parents Alliance Employment Project and Little Friends and camps, we're showing manufacturers how powerful a diverse workforce can be. It's smart business.



**Q: What message does Kane County hope to send with its investment in manufacturing?**

**A:** Plain and simple: Manufacturing matters here. The Kane County Board is putting real dollars behind that message. We're investing in programs and even launched the Kane County Economic Development Corporation. This effort was championed by the current County Board Chairman, Corinne Pierog. We're not just talking about it. We're doing the work to keep manufacturing growing, modern, local, and accessible for a broader workforce more than ever.







*"We didn't just fund programs. We seeded long-term partnerships that will continue to grow beyond the grant."*

**MARK VANKERKHOFF,**  
DIRECTOR OF THE  
DEVELOPMENT &  
COMMUNITY SERVICES  
DEPARTMENT, KANE COUNTY



# IMPACT STORIES

## HARTING AMERICAS: LEADING WITH INNOVATION

**HARTING Americas**, a global leader in industrial connectivity solutions, embarked on its first collaboration with IMEC through the Kane County Grant Program. The focus was tailored to operational and workforce development assistance.

Danny Malouf, HARTING's Regional Director of People and Development, said the grant's appeal lay in its dual focus: hands-on operational improvements and workforce development. He said both are aligned closely with the company's ongoing efforts to expand and optimize its Elgin facility, which serves as the North American headquarters for global HARTING Technology Group.

The most immediate impact for HARTING came in the realm of workforce development. IMEC facilitated a DiSC (Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Conscientiousness) assessment for the operations leadership team, which included not only directors and managers but also individual contributors. This exercise fostered deeper team building, improved communication, and provided valuable insights into the strengths and opportunities within HARTING's 300-employee workforce. The timing was fortuitous, according to Malouf, as it coincided with the arrival of a new director of operations and enabled the integration of new leadership into the company's culture.

Building on this foundation, HARTING collaborated with IMEC to launch a Manager Forum, a program aimed at developing managerial effectiveness across its multicultural teams spanning the U.S., Canada, Mexico, and Brazil. Recognizing the unique challenges of leading in a global context, HARTING requested customized cross-cultural awareness training.

IMEC responded by designing a live, interactive session that was far more impactful than generic e-learning modules. The training addressed the nuances of working across diverse regions and cultures. This initiative not only enhanced leadership skills but also reinforced HARTING's commitment to effective collaboration within its international footprint, according to Malouf.

IMEC lent support beyond internal development. HARTING leveraged the IMEC network to participate in leadership programs, joining peers from other manufacturing companies. These programs fostered organic networking and the exchange of best practices, further embedding HARTING in the local manufacturing ecosystem. While some operational improvement projects identified in the initial assessment are still pending, Malouf said the relationship with IMEC has already yielded tangible benefits in workforce cohesion, leadership development, and organizational learning.

HARTING anticipates future projects with IMEC to expand successful programs like the DiSC assessment.

The program, as experienced by HARTING Americas, shows the value of strategic partnerships where external expertise, grant-funded resources, and a willingness to learn accelerate growth in a competitive industry.



**Pushing Performance**  
Since 1945

### CORE PROJECT GOALS:

- ✓ Upskill workforce
- ✓ Accelerate operations
- ✓ Improve productivity

*“We walked away with better processes, better documentation, and most importantly, better people in place.”*

**DANNY MALOUF,**  
REGIONAL DIRECTOR OF  
PEOPLE AND DEVELOPMENT,  
HARTING AMERICAS



## LABELS & SPECIALTY PRODUCTS: BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR GROWTH

For **Labels & Specialty Products**, a 40-year-old, family-owned label manufacturer serving the food and consumer goods industries, the grant was a catalyst for long-overdue transformation.

Based in St. Charles, the company has long prided itself on quality, flexibility, and customer relationships. It serves both startups with 500-label orders and national brands with 500 million label runs. But as the company prepared for its next stage of growth, internal gaps began to show, particularly around onboarding and retention.

"We didn't have a unified onboarding process," said Anita Tyndall, Labels & Specialty Products' Production and Scheduling Manager, who oversees continuous improvement. "Every department kind of had its own approach. We were just handing over a training binder and saying, 'Good luck.'"

The old approach wasn't just inefficient, it jeopardized the employee experience and risked undermining the close-knit team culture that has been key to the company's longevity.

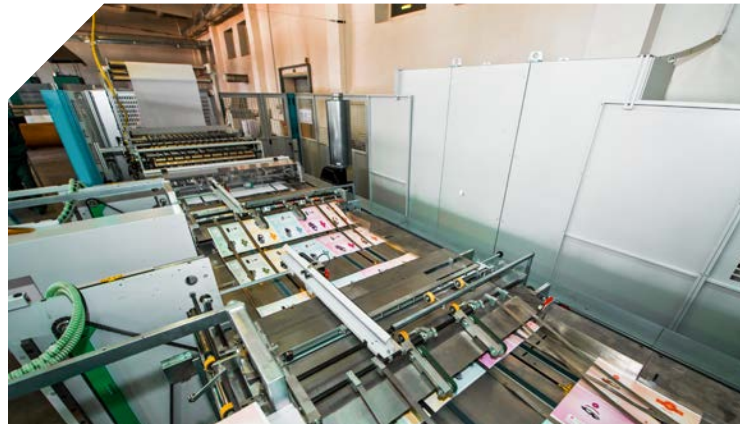
Through two grants and with the support of IMEC and third-party resource Holistic, Labels & Specialty Products developed a structured, company-wide onboarding system. Holistic helped the team synthesize homegrown best practices and formalize them into a repeatable, supportive process. New hires now receive guided training, are assigned champions and coaches, and receive an interdepartmental welcome that integrates them more naturally into the company.

The impact has been immediate. "We have very little employee turnover," Tyndall noted, "but this system will help us maintain that as we grow. We're better prepared to welcome new employees and keep them."

Tyndall emphasized that without the grant, the project likely wouldn't have happened. "It would've sat on the back burner. It's something every company should do, but with day-to-day demands, it's hard to prioritize," she said. "The grant gave us the structure and the motivation to act."

Now, the company is looking ahead by enrolling employees in IMEC leadership training and exploring new areas for improvement. "We get so deep into manufacturing labels that it helps to have experts like IMEC guide us on company-wide growth strategies," said Tyndall.

For Labels & Specialty Products, participation wasn't just about process improvement; it was about preparing for the future, one employee at a time.



## Labels & Specialty Products

### CORE PROJECT GOALS:

- ✓ Increase manufacturing productivity
- ✓ Improve operations
- ✓ Retain qualified workforce

**“We saw an immediate impact once we connected with IMEC. It wasn’t just about guidance, it was about execution.”**

**ANITA TYNDALL,  
PRODUCTION AND  
SCHEDULING MANAGER,  
LABELS & SPECIALTY  
PRODUCTS**

## MDI-CO: PRECISION MANUFACTURING WITH A NATIONAL MISSION

Andrew Johnson founded MDi-co in a shed behind his garage. The Gilberts-based company has grown rapidly from a two-person shop to a 33-person precision machining company serving high-stakes industries including aerospace and defense.

MDi-co's growth has been fueled by its deep commitment to customer relationships and a willingness to evolve. In just four years, the company has increased its business sevenfold, expanding beyond CNC machining into fulfillment, assembly, and engineering to meet customer needs.

The company faced a critical challenge in 2024. A key customer serving the Department of Defense required MDi-co to become ISO 9001 certified, an internationally recognized quality management standard.

Without certification, MDi-co risked losing business vital to its continued growth in the defense sector. That's when IMEC stepped in. Through grant funding and expert support, MDi-co worked closely with IMEC Technical Specialist Margo Barr-Kosier to map out a path to certification.

"We had the motivation, but not the internal expertise," said Leah Johnson, Compliance Manager at MDi-co. "Margo helped us identify what we had in place, where the gaps were, and how to close them."

The grant allowed MDi-co to pursue ISO certification without diverting critical resources away from hiring, equipment upgrades, or customer commitments. As a result, the certification was achieved ahead of the DoD customer's deadline, helping MDi-co preserve and potentially expand its presence in the defense supply chain.

"MDi-co just earned ISO certification and is a few steps from entering the aerospace supply chain because it has committed to simplifying systems, training their workforce, and building a culture of accountability," said Barr-Kosier. "This isn't just compliance. It's MDi-co and Kane County showing the world that small manufacturers can meet the highest global standards."

"Our machined parts with micron-level precision components are integrated into critical systems. Some of our parts fly, some stay on the ground," said Kate Kugelman, Chief Operating Officer. "But all of them must meet the highest quality standards."

With a foothold in the defense and aerospace sectors, MDi-co is poised for continued growth. Its partnership with IMEC safeguarded jobs, preserved key contracts, and positioned the company to keep supporting the mission-critical needs of the U.S. defense industry.



### CORE PROJECT GOALS:

- ✓ Improve internal processes
- ✓ Create job opportunities
- ✓ Meet complex customer and government quality standards

*"We support Department of Defense contracts. With IMEC's help, we improved quality, streamlined production, and set ourselves up to grow smart."*

**KATE KUGELMAN,**  
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER,  
MDI-CO

## R&G SPRINGS: SECURING AMERICA'S FUTURE WITH PRECISION

Tucked away in an industrial park off Big Timber Road in Elgin, a small family-owned company is doing big things for America's national security and global competitiveness. **R&G Springs**, founded nearly four decades ago by Slovakian-born parents, now supplies ultra-precise springs and components to the aerospace and defense industries.

These small parts are mission-critical. "We may be a small shop, but we're making parts that go into U.S. fighter jets and nuclear turbines," said Michael Hudec, the company's second-generation owner. "If our springs fail, systems fail. But to keep making these parts to spec and to government standards, we need help keeping up with global pressures and regulatory demands."

That help came in the form of IMEC providing expert guidance, lean manufacturing tools, and process redesigns to R&G Springs, all at a critical time of generational transition and scaling.

With just five employees and legacy equipment, R&G had long relied on founder know-how and handcrafted methods. Like many U.S. small manufacturers, they were rich in skill but thin on standardization. That changed when the IMEC team of improvement specialists and experts from Holistic walked through the door.

"IMEC helped us transition from tribal knowledge to documented process," said Erin Braber, the company's HR and Compliance Manager. "We didn't just want to survive. We needed to modernize so we could keep playing in the big leagues, especially in the defense industry."

The company is now implementing lean manufacturing tools such as 5S (Sort, Set in Order, Shine, Standardize, and Sustain) practices, refining its quality assurance systems, and creating cross-training playbooks to strengthen business continuity and workforce resilience. For the first time, metrics like throughput yield and rework are tracked and discussed daily.

In one case, IMEC helped the company reduce scrap and rework by over 40%, a level of improvement that would have taken years to achieve without expert coaching. That's a major win not only for the company, but for the Department of Defense supply chain it supports.

To comply with DoD acquisition rules (DFARS), R&G Springs must source all its materials from U.S.-based vendors. That means U.S.-mined ore, U.S.-milled steel, and U.S.-certified documentation. For large manufacturers, compliance may be a given. For small firms like R&G Springs, it's a full-time job.

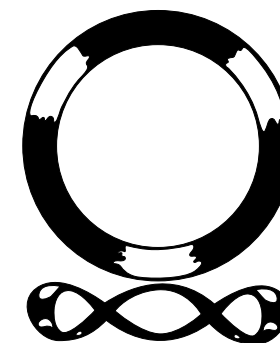
Yet companies like R&G Springs keep legacy aircraft fleets in the sky and advanced propulsion systems functioning safely by producing micro-run, mission-specific parts that aren't economical or secure to outsource overseas.

"Some of the aircraft we support were built in the 1950s," Hudec explained. "They're still flying, but no one makes these parts anymore. Except us."

Without continued investment in manufacturing assistance and training grants, small businesses like R&G Springs could become vulnerable to closure or foreign acquisition. The loss wouldn't just be economic. It would erode America's sovereign industrial base in aerospace and defense.

"For every dollar invested in IMEC services, the return is exponential," said Hudec. "Not just for us, but for the national interest. These grants are keeping jobs here, parts here, and capabilities here."

With the right support, American manufacturers help the country's aircraft fly higher, last longer, and stay safer.



### CORE PROJECT GOALS:

- ✓ Increase manufacturing capabilities
- ✓ Implement ERP software
- ✓ Standardize training
- ✓ Expand workforce

*"We're a small company doing big things in aerospace and defense and that means precision and process matter more than ever."*

**MICHAEL HUDEC,  
SECOND-GENERATION  
OWNER, R&G SPRINGS**





*"We support Department of Defense contracts. With IMEC's help, we improved quality, streamlined production, and set ourselves up to grow smart."*

**KATE KUGELMAN,  
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER,  
MDI-CO**

## IMEC LEADS THE WAY

IMEC provided a strategic approach, expert knowledge, objectivity, and a team of technical specialists to grant recipients. It was the boots on the ground needed for manufacturers hungry to learn, improve, and take action.

IMEC is a team of improvement specialists providing Illinois manufacturers with tools and techniques to excel and compete globally.

The experienced hands-on team at IMEC works closely with its clients to plan critical business improvements in all areas of their organization through our core solutions: Lead Your Company, Plan For Success, Grow Your Business, Improve Your Operations, Focus On People, and Decide With Data.



## 2024 CLIENT-REPORTED IMPACTS



**7,736**  
JOBS CREATED  
AND RETAINED



**\$873M+**  
AGGREGATE  
IMPACT



**\$2.05M+**  
AVERAGE NEW AND  
RETAINED SALES



**2,890**  
COMPANIES  
ASSISTED



**19:1**  
RETURN ON  
INVESTMENT



**\$245k+**  
AVERAGE COST  
SAVINGS

*“What’s holding back America’s small manufacturers isn’t capability, it’s capacity. In Kane County, we’re helping owners shift from doing the work to leading the company. When a tool setup goes from ten minutes to ten seconds, that’s not just efficiency, it’s global competitiveness in motion.”*

MARK LOSCUDO,  
IMEC TECHNICAL SPECIALIST



## EXPERT RESOURCES

In addition to the various IMEC-led projects under the grant, IMEC invited third-party resources to assist and address niche challenges. Here they are.

### FABRICATORS AND MANUFACTURERS ASSOCIATION

Fabricators and Manufacturers Association (FMA) assisted at a number of manufacturing summer camps throughout Kane County. The camps helped develop and attract talent for manufacturing through hands-on learning and soft skills development.

"Participants learn essential soft skills, safety protocols, and engage in practical activities such as packaging, which prepares them for job opportunities in the manufacturing field," said Suzie Dahlke-Beard, FMA Program Development Specialist. Aimed at students aged 16 and older, the camps combined classroom instruction with real-world experience over several weeks.

"The goal at the end of this is to be aware of the job opportunities and pursuing potentially one of those job opportunities," said Dahlke-Beard. "We train the students on what does a normal, healthy working relationship look like? How do you talk to a boss about something? What are safety procedures? How do you know how to speak up and advocate for yourself in any situation at work?"



This approach ensures that learners leave with both technical and interpersonal skills, ready to contribute in a meaningful manner in the manufacturing sector.

### HOLISTIC

Holistic's involvement with the operations-focused grants demonstrates the value of business support. "It's been really incredible working with these small mom-and-pop manufacturing companies," said Guthrie Blechman, Holistic's Senior Director of Client Services. "It's one of my favorite types of projects to do because it feels connected to the manufacturing community, and that's just something I like." Holistic provided grant recipients foundational support, from handbook and policy audits to job description reviews and website recommendations.

Companies, like R&G Springs and HARTING Americas, utilized Holistic's expertise across a variety of human resources, personnel, and business initiatives. "We were able to provide a little bit more of the foundational expertise and support," said Blechman, who believes that this incremental, tailored approach helps small manufacturers build capacity and resilience for the future.

"The manufacturers were incredibly open," said Blechman. "It wasn't about changing who they were. It was about reinforcing what already made them special and giving them tools to grow with confidence."



*"Trust is built on data when the data is used to make things better. That's what we're helping manufacturers do."*

**GUTHRIE BLECHMAN,**  
SENIOR DIRECTOR OF CLIENT  
SERVICES, HOLISTIC

*"This was about putting people in the shop, in the environment, and showing them that you could be here next."*

**SUZIE DAHLKE-BEARD,**  
PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT  
SPECIALIST, FABRICATORS  
& MANUFACTURERS  
ASSOCIATION



## LITTLE FRIENDS

**Little Friends'** expansion into Kane County is marked by a commitment to workforce development and practical opportunities for non-traditional candidates.

Program Director Cassidy Kaput said, "Our goal is to create a space where every participant feels valued and has a real chance to learn skills they can use in manufacturing environments."

The organization hosts Skills Work Manufacturing Camps from June through August. Supported by IMEC, FMA, and Kane County, the camps are designed to bridge the gap between education and employment. Participants learn what it takes to work in manufacturing, from 3-D printing to practicing communication skills.

Business Engagement and Support Manager Anthony Miser added, "It's not just about job training, it's about building confidence, giving people the chance to try new things, and showing local businesses what our participants can do."



By collaborating with local manufacturers, Little Friends exposes clients to technology programs and job opportunities. As Kaput noted, "We're seeing more doors open for our clients, and that's what makes this work so rewarding." The organization's approach is a model for how targeted partnerships and hands-on experiences drive personal growth and community.



## PARENTS ALLIANCE EMPLOYMENT PROJECT

**Parents Alliance Employment Project (PAEP)** is a cornerstone in Kane County's workforce pipeline for non-traditional candidates, providing job placement, long-term support, and advocacy. Program Manager Kiersten Lira said, "We work closely with local employers and educators to make sure our clients have the skills and support they need to succeed."



Through programs and summer camps in conjunction with manufacturers, PAEP offers hands-on work experience and exposure to real-world environments.

Lira emphasized the importance of support: "It's about more than finding a job. It's about building confidence, community, and a sense of purpose."

"When our participants see what they're capable of in a real workplace," she added, "it changes how they see themselves and how others see them too. That's the real impact."

PAEP's work demonstrates how targeted partnerships create lasting impact for individuals and the broader community.

*"It's not charity. It's capability. Our participants want to work, and they're proving they can when given a chance."*

**CASSIDY KAPUT,  
PROGRAM DIRECTOR,  
LITTLE FRIENDS**

*"We're helping companies fill roles not just with talent, but with people who are motivated and coachable."*

**KIERSTEN LIRA,  
PROGRAM MANAGER,  
PARENTS ALLIANCE  
EMPLOYMENT PROJECT**

# MORE WORK TO DO

The Kane County Manufacturing Grant Program, led by IMEC, shows what's possible when public investment meets private sector urgency. It is a proven, scalable model for supporting U.S. manufacturing.

The manufacturers you've learned about here are now transforming operations, streamlining workforce pipelines, and modernizing their leadership and technology practices. From this, a broader impact follows. Because every time a manufacturer accelerates potential, it grows the economy, upskills communities, boosts job retention, and oftentimes strengthens national security supply chains.

## MANUFACTURERS HAVE VOICED A CLEAR WAY FORWARD: KEEP THE EXPERTS IN THE ROOM, KEEP THE CONVERSATIONS ALIVE, AND KEEP THE FOCUS ON ACTION, NOT THEORY.

This is only the beginning.

The Kane County Manufacturing Grant Program proves the time is now to support domestic supply chains and prepare for emerging technologies. Like Kane County, you too can take a bold step forward to make manufacturers more competitive. If you're a manufacturing company, government policy-maker, industry or economic leader, here are success strategies that work:

- ✓ Create a vision for operational improvements to drive big change.
- ✓ Identify drivers to close gaps between your vision and where you are today.
- ✓ Break down a gap into manageable steps that will guarantee success.
- ✓ Access key resources to drive results more quickly.
- ✓ Understand the cultural and physical assets that create your work environment.
- ✓ Reshape your work environment to attract and support a wider range of skilled talent.

To maintain momentum, the next phase must embed continuous improvement and workforce development into the DNA of a region's manufacturing economy.

As the Kane County Manufacturing Grant Program ends, its legacy continues. Manufacturers that once struggled to find workers or modernize operations now have plans in place, systems running, and partners for the road ahead.

The goal of IMEC is to replicate this success across more regions in Illinois. Lessons learned here about trust, partnership, and the power of shared vision guide that journey.

We close with this: This report signals a new opportunity to accelerate manufacturing potential. It is a call to action. How will you respond?

“Compliance doesn’t have to be complicated. When we reduce 400 documents to 40, we’re not just streamlining, we’re unlocking doors to aerospace, medical, and defense sectors. Kane County companies are proving small teams can meet the world’s highest standards.”

MARGO BARR-KOSIER,  
IMEC TECHNICAL SPECIALIST

# CHAMPIONING MANUFACTURING

**You made it happen!** IMEC thanks the many manufacturers and workforce organizations who contributed to the success of the Kane County Manufacturing Grant Program.

- ✓ Accutek Inc.
- ✓ ACS Manufacturing
- ✓ Aeromotive Services Inc.
- ✓ Allied Rivet
- ✓ Alpha Form Technologies
- ✓ Alps Wire Rope Corporation
- ✓ AmeriChem Systems Inc.
- ✓ Amsted Automotive
- ✓ Assurance Technologies, Inc.
- ✓ Aurora Defense Group
- ✓ AutonomyWorks
- ✓ Axis Designs & Architectural Millwork, Inc.
- ✓ Batavia Container Inc.
- ✓ BTR Controls, Inc.
- ✓ Burgess-Norton Manufacturing Company (part of the Amsted Automotive Group)
- ✓ Cap & Seal LP
- ✓ Cat-i Glass
- ✓ CFS Brands
- ✓ Challenger Lighting Company, Inc.
- ✓ Compact Industries, Inc.
- ✓ Creative Electronics and Software, Inc.
- ✓ Deep Coat Industries
- ✓ Dukane
- ✓ Extractor Corporation
- ✓ Fabricators and Manufacturers Association
- ✓ Gindo's Spice of Life
- ✓ Gripple Inc.
- ✓ Hansen Plastics Corporation
- ✓ HARTING Americas
- ✓ HELUKABEL® USA, Inc.
- ✓ HFI
- ✓ Hoffer Plastics
- ✓ Holistic
- ✓ International Valve LLC
- ✓ JN Machinery Corp.
- ✓ K+L Storytellers
- ✓ Kane County
- ✓ Labels & Specialty Products
- ✓ LaFox Screw Products, Inc.
- ✓ Laser Pro Company, Inc.
- ✓ Little Friends
- ✓ Made to Measure
- ✓ McCormick Flavor Solutions
- ✓ MDi-co
- ✓ NextPlay Marketing
- ✓ Odin Fabrication, Inc.
- ✓ Parents Alliance Employment Project
- ✓ Perla Foods USA Corp.
- ✓ PMA Friction Products
- ✓ Power Electronics® International, Inc.®
- ✓ R&G Springs Company Inc.
- ✓ Richards-Wilcox, Inc.
- ✓ Rieke Interiors
- ✓ S5 Capital Group
- ✓ Schleifring Medical Systems
- ✓ Suncast® Corporation
- ✓ Timken Aurora Bearing Company
- ✓ Trans Machine
- ✓ UCAL Systems, Inc.
- ✓ Unilock
- ✓ US MFG
- ✓ Valley Industrial Association
- ✓ Warwick Publishing Company
- ✓ Weldstar Company, Inc.
- ✓ Wise Plastics Technologies
- ✓ WPA Works LLC

“As a global company, we need our U.S.  
operations to lead with innovation—  
and this program gave us the edge to do that.”

Danny Malouf  
Regional Director of People and Development  
HARTING Americas



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STATE OF ILLINOIS )  
COUNTY OF KANE ) SS.

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**WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT DIVISION STAFF PRESENTATION**