

MADE IN Northeastern PA

Each month, we recognize one of the region's top manufacturers with the aid of NEPIRC, the Northeastern Pennsylvania Industrial Resource Center. Since 1988, NEPIRC has been working with manufacturers to improve their productivity, profitability, competitiveness and long-term viability through consultative services.



Manufacturers discuss successful job creation and sustainment tactics

A Columbia County manufacturer undergoing a multi-million-dollar expansion was the site of a recent Manufacturing Executive Network meeting.

During the meeting, regional manufacturers discussed the importance of sustaining and creating manufacturing jobs throughout the northeastern Pennsylvania region, and successful tactics they have implemented to accomplish that objective. Cheetah Chassis, which manufactures more than 2,000 truck container chassis and flatbed trailers each year, hosted the meeting at their Berwick facility. The facility is in the midst of a \$2.5 million expansion that will enable the company to fabricate I-beams and other structures that they currently purchase from outside suppliers. The expansion will also improve the company's safety and quality systems while simultaneously reducing production costs, said Garry Hartman, Cheetah Chassis' President.



Cheetah Chassis President Garry Hartman, right, gives a tour of his manufacturing facilities to U.S. Rep. Lou Barletta, left, and NEPIRC Vice President of Consulting Operations Dale Parmenteri.

The Manufacturing Executive Network was formed earlier this year by the Northeastern Pennsylvania Industrial Resource Center to provide a venue within which manufacturing

CEOs could share ideas, strategies and success stories. The Network meets on a monthly basis and focuses on initiatives that have enabled manufacturers to become more competitive, increase core revenue and create new manufacturing jobs.

In addition to their expansion, Cheetah Chassis has successfully pursued other ways of remaining competitive. For example, the company recently implemented new processes that shortened the lead time for customized products built to meet customers' unique requirements. "NEPIRC worked with our engineering department to find ways to reduce the time needed to design specialty products and streamline our production," Hartman said.

Cheetah Chassis, like many manufacturers throughout America, once faced significant competition from foreign-made competing products, which initially carried a lower price point. The company negated some of their foreign competitors' price advantage through the implementation of lean manufacturing techniques and process improvement, then partnered that strategy with one of providing design services, customized products and short lead times – none of which could be matched by their overseas competitors.



U.S. Rep. Lou Barletta speaks to manufacturers at Cheetah Chassis in Berwick.

By successfully competing on matters other than price, the company is experiencing growth and looking forward to adding new jobs. The company currently employs 125 team members, nearly 40 of which are highly-qualified welders.

This particular meeting of the Manufacturing Executive Network was attended by Congressman Lou Barletta. Network meetings are open to all elected officials so that they hear from their manufacturing constituents and bring their stories to Harrisburg and Washington, DC. Congressman Barletta was clearly impressed with Cheetah Chassis' journey of determination, continuous improvement and growth. "Cheetah Chassis is a perfect example of a company that

has had to deal with the minefield of challenges that employers face. They've been in business more than 30 years in Berwick, and know better than anybody what it takes to be competitive today. When I see a company like Cheetah Chassis, my confidence in American ingenuity is reinforced," Barletta said.

During the meeting, Congressman Barletta and members of the Manufacturing Executive Network also received an update on NEPIRC's reshoring initiative, which is designed to bring manufacturing jobs back to Pennsylvania by providing no-cost reshoring assistance services and Pennsylvania-based supplier scouting assistance.

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