



MANUFACTURING BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

Throughout its 60-year history, Brand Hydraulics has achieved consistent growth by striving to actively engage each employee at every level throughout the corporation.

That vision has become even more focused since the company partnered with NBDC to establish a culture of continuous improvement through the implementation of lean manufacturing concepts.

"NBDC has been with us ever since we started down our lean journey in 2013," says Brand's Executive Vice President, Charlie Klahn. "Rachel Baxter came in and conducted a lean workshop and got the whole production side involved."

Scott White, Brand's production manager, says the company had been building valves the same way for decades. "Now, with what we've learned, our whole production area has changed," he says. "We've moved out nearly half the tables we had in our production area, and instead of straight lines and batch processing, we are now utilizing one piece flow. We've configured cells that enable us to streamline the process."

For example, previously it took 421 square feet of

floor space and 507 walking steps to construct one particular valve. With lean techniques and a cellular work station, it takes 120 square feet of floor space and only 10 walking steps.

Changing a corporate culture requires active participation, Klahn says. "We involve the people who actually make the products," she says. "We empower them. It isn't management coming down and saying, 'You're going to build it this way.' We have given them a voice."

Brand has hosted NBDC workshops and Kaizen (continuous improvement) events on a variety of topics including set-up reduction, value stream mapping, on-time delivery and customer relations.

Additionally, the company has installed an Idea Board where employees are invited to share their suggestions for improvement in any area. The ideas are tracked from proposal to completion, and employees are encouraged to take ownership of their ideas and make the improvements themselves.

"Being able to express their ideas has a snowball effect," Klahn says. "They gain pride in seeing their ideas implemented. Because they are engaged and

The **Manufacturing Business of the Year** is awarded to a Nebraska business that demonstrates leadership in employee involvement, continual process improvement, customer and supplier relations, innovation and new product development, sales growth, and sustainability.

- 2011 – Overhead Door
- 2012 – Tri-V Tool & Manufacturing
- 2013 – Certified Transmission
- 2014 – KZCO
- 2015 – Brand Hydraulics

empowered, turnover and training have improved."

Brand Hydraulics is also working to make production processes more sustainable. Improvements have ranged from energy-efficient lighting and motion sensors to recyclable packaging and biodegradable shipping materials.

"Waste and material management are part of every employee's job," Klahn says. "Safety and quality remain top priorities and waste reduction comes next. Our people have come up with some great ideas to increase efficiency and we involve them in the effort."

White has earned Lean Manufacturing Certification through the NBDC and is looking



Charlie Klahn, executive vice president; Ed Rennolds, 41 years of service

forward to Next Level Lean training this year.

"We are all benefitting because our relationship with the people at NBDC is a true partnership," he says. "Between workshops, they'll contact us just to check in and see how our journey is going."

Klahn says NBDC consultants have made it clear they are always available for guidance and support. "They're truly invested in the companies they help."

