

# SUCCESS STORY: AIRLITE PLASTICS

## 2018 Manufacturing Business of the Year



A commitment to lean manufacturing processes, coupled with a coordinated effort to continuously innovate and improve its processes, distinguishes Airlite Plastics of Omaha as a leader in producing food packaging, drink cups and lids, polystyrene coolers, insulated concrete form building blocks and other custom products.

Privately held and family-owned for more than 70 years, Airlite Plastics produces 2 billion molded units per year at its manufacturing facilities in Omaha and Nazareth, Penn. Together, the facilities total more than one-half million square feet of production and storage area, with a workforce of approximately 1,000 people.

The company continuously applies the latest technologies in the development of new molds and creating customized approaches to thin-wall plastic packaging. For example, Airlite was the first in its industry to develop the four-level stack mold, and the company commercializes award-winning stock In-Mold Labeled packages, giving its customers access to new designs at affordable entry costs.

Jesse Kaufman, director of quality and continuous improvement, says Airlite partnered with the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) to guide the facilitation of lean implementation and overall operations improvements, and to provide lean training to Airlite managers, supervisors and engineers. NBDC has since delivered lean training to three groups of Airlite leaders, with a fourth group currently in training. Additionally, NBDC has presented on-site workshops that give Airlite personnel insight on ways to improve productivity and heighten customer satisfaction.

“We continue to utilize our NBDC grads in a number of ways,” Kaufman says. “They have helped us implement 5S initiatives, and set up reduction initiatives. Weaving what they have learned into everyday operations can be contagious. If one person implements a change and others around them see the benefits, it gets everyone interested.”

He says the NBDC consultants do well to break the learning materials into concepts that everyone can understand, no matter their job. Airlite has hosted several NBDC Lean Enterprise Certificate workshops including 5S/Workplace Organization, Set-Up Reduction, Principles of Lean, and Standard Work, bringing together participants from other Omaha-area companies.

“We have benefited by hosting these workshops, because we can take what our students discover about what others are doing compared to our own processes and put their new knowledge to use on improving the production floor,” Kaufman says. “It’s a great way to engage our employees and watch them bring value to the company.”

Airlite continues to invest in its people through leadership training and development, the use of the National Career Readiness Certificate in hiring and employee development, and monitoring and improving employee engagement with tools such as the Gallup Q12 Employee Engagement assessment.

### REPORT DATE

- › March, 2019

### INDUSTRY

- › Plastic manufacturing

### CONSULTING

- › Lean training

### RESULTS

- › Implementation of 5S and Set Up Reduction
- › Host of NBDC certificate workshops
- › Gallup Q12 Employee Engagement tool

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