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**A GENUINE ADVANTAGE: HOW ARIZONA MEP TRANSFORMED VANTAGE
MOBILITY**

Lean Trainings Lead the Way to Increases in Production, Quality Upgrades, and United Team Environment

PHOENIX, AZ – Vantage Mobility International (VMI) is well on its way to achieving its goal: to become the number one provider of personal mobility transportation solutions by the end of 2010.

“We’re transforming our business from soup to nuts,” said Doug Eaton, president and CEO of VMI. “Our company is growing and we are looking for ways to perform on a new plane. We had been looking for someone to get down to the roots of our organization and make some sustainable changes. A quick online search brought up the Arizona Manufacturing Extension Partnership (Arizona MEP) and we knew they’d be the perfect fit for us.”

“VMI is a great company. They convert top-of-the line vans into vehicles designed for individuals in wheelchairs so they can enjoy the freedom to travel as comfortable as possible. That means they take everything off the vehicle, and rewire and reassemble with new parts such as a new ramp and mechanisms to move that ramp,” said Jim Godfrey, Arizona MEP project manager. “The Honda Odyssey is their flagship product and a very popular one among customers, so we began by leaning out that production line of minivans.”

The Arizona MEP team also conducted a total of three Time Wise® Principles of Lean Manufacturing workshops for VMI employees, so they could understand the benefits of using Lean to make a difference in their performance. Once on the Honda line, the team also demonstrated how they can use Lean techniques to eliminate waste, such as 5s workplace organization and Value Stream Mapping (VSM).

“The lean training allowed our team to visualize breakthrough performance,” added Eaton. “Applying these techniques to a section of our production line was equally powerful and rewarding.”

One problem VMI wanted help with had to do with the parts that were taken off of the vehicle. Every part from the panels to the electronic components had to be stripped out of the car, and all those parts were stored in one large box. Some of them were getting damaged before they were put back in the van, costing VMI time and money for replacement parts and repairs.

“We conducted a Kaizen event to help VMI with this particular issue. The biggest thing that came out of it was we took that large box and set it on its end so it looked more like a rolling closet. Then we partitioned it off with boards and carpet so every panel would have its own place. There is even a place for the spare tire, and electronics now go in separate buckets. Now parts are easy to find, and they can just wheel up the box behind the van and not have to spend the time sifting around for the needed parts,” added Godfrey.

VMI, with the assistance of Arizona MEP has since conducted two additional Kaizen, both with significant cost savings impact. We are looking forward to continuing to work with the Arizona MEP team to achieve maximum impact on lean investment.

“Working with the Arizona MEP was definitely a major investment for our company and worth every penny,” said Steven Crandell, VP of Quality at VMI. “We now have employees who we’d classify as new thinkers, as they are leading the Lean transition. These are people we thought would be against any type of change, but are now forging ahead successfully. Our whole team is committed to making this transformation, and now we’re all speaking the same language. We owe much of our newfound success to the Arizona MEP.”

The Arizona MEP is an affiliate of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) under the U.S. Department of Commerce. The national MEP is a network of manufacturing extension centers that provide business and technical assistance to smaller manufacturers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Through MEP, manufacturers have access to more than 2000 manufacturing and business “coaches” whose job is to help firms make changes that lead to greater productivity, increased profits, and enhanced global competitiveness. For more information on the Arizona MEP program call 480-874-9100.

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Arizona Manufacturing Extension Partnership

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