

and the McHenry County Economic Development Corp. has been driving this initiative forward with our collaborative partners the McHenry County Workforce Network and McHenry County College for many years. In addition, many of our local manufacturers have been working independently with area high schools to educate students about opportunities in manufacturing.

One often hears that manufacturing is on the decline in the U.S. That is not correct. What is correct is that manufacturers have been enhancing efficiencies through the use of new technology. The result of these advanced manufacturing techniques is that the skill level of the workforce has also been raised creating the need for more skilled employees. Manufacturers also have been able to increase production by utilizing new techniques within their existing building so there is no need to construct additional facilities. In talking with a number of our manufacturers, in the last two years, on an aggregate basis in McHenry County, more than \$100 million has been spent on equipment, facility enhancements and training.

McHenry County's focus on manufacturing continues to gain momentum by all of us talking and working together as partners.

Here are some examples:

- MCC and the Workforce Network with support from the MCEDC received funding to create a welding boot camp back in 2007. It has been a success and model frequently referenced by elected officials, educators and manufacturers

- MCC joined a consortium of community colleges for an advanced manufacturing grant which resulted in the new Robotics program;

- MCEDC has a dedicated website for manufacturing - www.illinoismanufacturing.net. This site provides a directory of McHenry County manufacturers, aids in expanding supply chain opportunities and posts news and events of interest to our manufacturers.

- MCEDC, McHenry County Workforce Network, MCC partnered with counties to the west such as Winnebago, Boone and six others, to seek the Make It In America grant to further support manufacturing. We're awaiting word on approval.

- The McHenry County Workforce Network and MCEDC together with our six collar county workforce and economic develop-

By **STEPHEN Di BENEDETTO**
 sdbenedetto@shawmedia.com

HUNTLEY – Owner Scott Lemajeur and his employees at Impact Plastics earlier this month introduced a more durable product aimed to address a common complaint among customers in the waste industry.

Plastic dumpster lids that contain the poignant smell of rotting trash and keeps rodents and bugs at bay were flimsy, breaking often at the hinge, the company would hear from customers.

Impact Plastics consequently developed the Double Impact "Wedge" Lid, a long piece of plastic that has a 20 percent thicker hinge line than its predecessor. It accomplished what the Huntley company wanted – a longer-lasting, durable product.

But the wedge lid's release on Sept. 12 was merely the culmination of a two-year process involving trial and error, innovation, a new facility, and a specialty oven that Lemajeur has said couldn't be achieved without a committed investment to research and development.

"We won't slow down on R&D," Lemajeur said. "I totally understand why people would, but we are a different type of company. We are trying to be innovators."

Impact Plastics primarily needed the technology to make the thicker lid. The industrial ovens available on the market wouldn't heat the plastic properly, since the new lid would be thinner on one end and much thicker near the hinge, Lemajeur said.

The inadequate heating would often warp the plastic.

Impact Plastics in turn developed plans and partnered with a Carol Stream company to design and test a specialty oven capable of heating the plastic at different temperatures.

Impact Plastics would eventually make a \$1 million investment in the ov-



Lathan Goumas - lgoumas@shawmedia.com

Tony Martinez of Impact Plastics removes excess plastic from a dumpster lid at the company's facility in Huntley.

Impact Plastics

What: Founded in 1999, Impact Plastics manufactures quality, environmentally-friendly products for the waste industry, including dumpster lids, casters, recycled wheels and roll-off parts.

Where: 11419 Smith Drive, Huntley

Phone: 877-454-3748



Lathan Goumas - lgoumas@shawmedia.com

Plastic dumpster lids at Impact Plastics in Huntley.

ens, added 20 employees to produce the new product in-house and relocated its operation from Elgin to a bigger facility in Huntley.

"We innovate it and make it better," Lemajeur said. "That's what we do on every single product we touch."

Since 1999, Impact Plastics has prided itself on developing, improving and researching ways to make its lids, casters and wheels better and more environmentally-friendly for its customers in the waste industry.

Impact Plastics' commitment to research and development comes as more companies throughout the Chicago region diminish their investment to R&D.

The seven-county Chicago region lost nearly half of its private research and

development jobs in the last decade, as investment declined, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning reported earlier this year.

The region consistently ranked as the country's second-largest research hub, next to New York, from 1970 to 2000, as the region's R&D spending tripled. But throughout the last decade the region's R&D output dropped by nearly \$2 billion to a total of \$4.1 billion, CMAP found.

The findings did not surprise Lemajeur, who said that companies shedding costs typically first look at research.

"The easiest thing to cut is R&D. You could make a 'me, too' product or compete on price," he said. "For

me, that is not the future. There is always someone who can go cheaper. For me, the future is value."

Pam Cumpata, president of the McHenry County Economic Development Corporation, sees a similar dedication to innovation with area companies like Sage Products, Covidien and Duraflex.

As the economy recovers, companies in the area are starting to feel more confident about research and development, Cumpata said.

"Research and development is not important, it's critical," she said. "It's all about how we improve a product, improve a process, and make things better. If we are not innovating, then business stops."

blinding circles on a white screen. Brightness is one of both products' major selling points.

"Clubs want to add an extra element of wow," said Marty Canavan, owner of the laser company YLS Entertainment Inc. "It used to be you were lucky to have two lasers on your show. Now you might have 26."

Sin City now boasts 21 of the country's 100 most profitable nightclubs, according to the trade publication Nightclub & Bar. The town also dominates the top 10 spots, with seven clubs bringing in more than \$25 million a year. The other three clubs with earnings in that range are LIV and Mango's Tropical Cafe in Miami Beach, and LAVO in New York City.

As clubs become increasingly important to casinos' bottom line, programmers are competing ever more fiercely to offer parties novelties they would never see at their local dance spot.

"It's the full package these days," said Pauly Freedman, director of operations for Encore Beach Club, Surrender and Andrea's at the Wynn Las Vegas. "The DJs come in and they have their music, but they're also bringing lighting directors in. So it's up to us when we're working alongside them to make sure we have the latest and greatest in our clubs."

Last month, Surrender distributed 3D glasses at the door so clubbers could take in the graphics popping out from behind DJ Morgan Page. Freedman is currently awaiting a new LED wall making its way on a boat from China. He promises it will be the brightest in the city.

At Flutter Fetti, which provides confetti for the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, the new thing this year is canons that sync automatically to a DJ's music, so that dancers are covered in metallic strips just as the track reaches its climax.

"Casinos need to create a celebration, and our products create the celebration," CEO Ronee Holmes said.

Several clubs are investing in individual confetti canons, cardboard tubes that range from \$1 to \$6 each.