

## Leaning Together: ILC Is Officially Part of CIRAS

*It's the dawning of a new era for the Iowa Lean Consortium, and Teresa Hay McMahon is focused on a new world of service.*

McMahon, executive director of the ILC since 2015, just finished leading the consortium through a new phase of its evolution. On July 1, the ILC formally moved under the CIRAS umbrella as part of a merger that's intended to give both entities more resources to achieve their goals.

For CIRAS, the combination provides a new tool for the effort to alleviate Iowa's lack of workers in manufacturing, health care, and other industries. For the ILC, the change means a chance to get more involved in making Iowa companies more productive.

"The most important thing is that we'll be able to provide better services and support to our members," McMahon said. "Joining CIRAS will give us the resources to help our current and future members like never before. I think that's going to be a big thing."

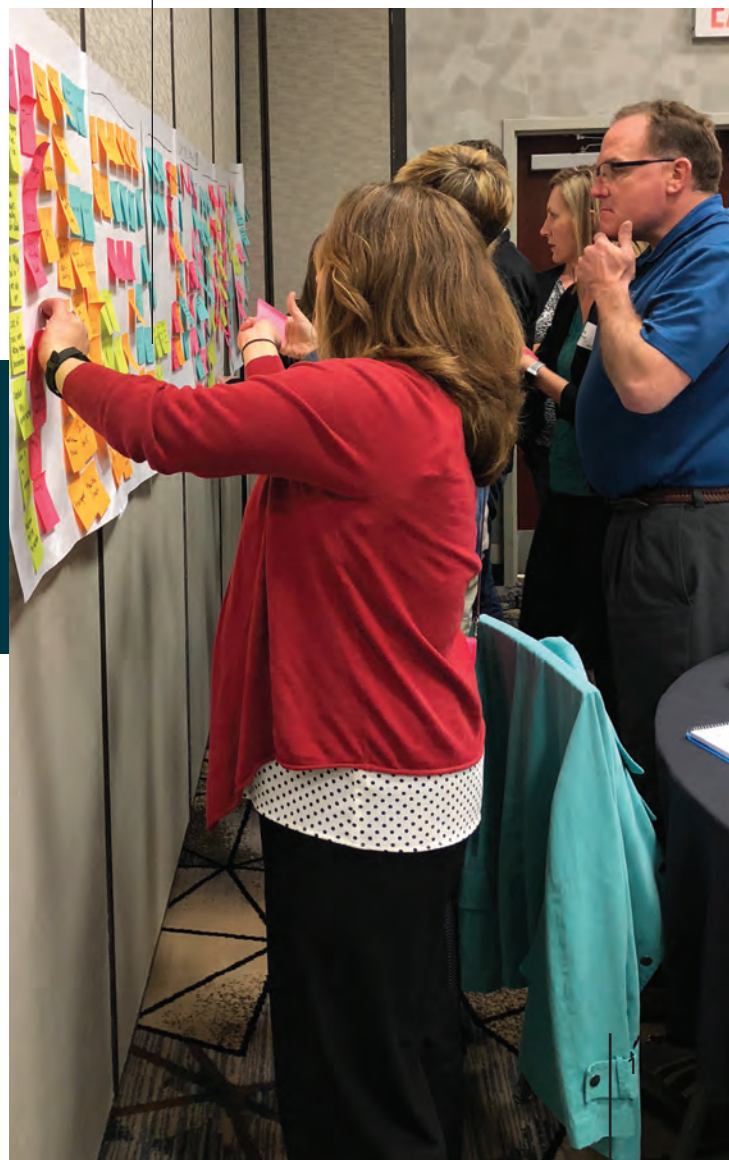
CIRAS director Ron Cox first broached the topic of a merger in discussions with McMahon last fall as a way to help both organizations focus more directly on their missions. The CIRAS Advisory Board and the ILC Board of Directors tentatively approved the merger earlier this year, followed by a final vote in April.

The ILC board, which is made up of nine members from companies that belong to the consortium, will continue to exist as an advisory entity that will be deeply involved in advocacy and strategic direction.

"One of the things that was important to the ILC from day one was that this be a member-driven entity," McMahon said. "We look to our members to tell us what they need. That's a big role for the board to fill."

Cox said a union with the ILC will help CIRAS accelerate its goal of getting Iowa businesses to think and act more efficiently. Lean manufacturing techniques, as pioneered by Toyota Motor Company in the 1980s, are a proven way to help organizations operate more

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— Teresa Hay McMahon



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productively. But a recent survey showed that only 19 percent of Iowa businesses have extensively implemented tools such as Lean.

Iowa industry leaders view productivity improvements as a major part of meeting the state's goal of boosting manufacturing GDP from \$29 billion to \$32 billion by 2022.

"We can't assume that a large number of new workers is going to materialize in Iowa," Cox said. "Iowa

has had workforce difficulties for a long time, and companies are going to have to embrace new ideas if they hope to continue growing without additional people. For the foreseeable future, growing the company is likely going to require that you grow through operational excellence."

"Lean is a very effective way to get there," Cox said. "We intend to recruit dozens of new members for the ILC and encourage as many companies as possible to take advantage of these productivity tools."

McMahon is hopeful that CIRAS' statewide network of experts will make

it easier to spread the message and encourage more Iowa organizations to join the 130-member ILC. CIRAS is currently working with the ILC board on a strategy to grow the consortium in a controlled manner.

"The ILC clearly is an underutilized resource," Cox said. "I am looking forward to working with Teresa and the board to increase the membership, bring more speakers to Iowa, and enhance the interactions between members. I



"We've barely scratched the surface of what could take place in Iowa....It's a world of opportunity."

— Teresa Hay McMahon

believe the consortium will be a critical partner for forward-looking companies. I'd love to see the ILC membership double in the next two years."

McMahon believes the pool of people who might benefit from Lean remains a deep one.

"We've barely scratched the surface of what could take place in Iowa," she said. "There are thousands of manufacturers out there.

There are all kinds of service companies. There are more hospitals and clinics. There's more to do in educational institutions, and we really haven't touched K-12.

"It's a world of opportunity."

➤ For more information, contact Teresa Hay McMahon at [thmc@iastate.edu](mailto:thmc@iastate.edu) or 515-715-0293.

**On the Cover:** The ILC held a "Creating a Successful Office" event in May. ABOVE: The annual ILC Conference in October 2017.

**CIRAS Mission:** Every day we will enhance the performance of industry through applied research, education, and technical assistance.

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# Water Security in Iowa Means Knowing What You Use and Having a Good Water Plan

*For Bill Zimmerle, plant manager of the Valent BioSciences Corporation (VBC) facility in Osage, it all comes down to planning for the future.*

The future, you see, requires water.

That's why VBC, which opened its Osage biochemical plant four years ago, now is working to obtain more control over both the water it receives from the city and the wastewater it creates. Valent BioSciences has spent roughly the past year working to take over management of the city-run pretreatment facility that processes its wastewater, and the company is talking about one day helping Osage build a citywide facility to soften the area's mineral-heavy drinking water.

All of this, Zimmerle believes, is simply good business.

"There's only a set amount of water on our earth," he said. "We don't want to just keep using it up. . . . If we're using more water than we need to from an industrial point of view, that's not any benefit to anyone. It's an increased cost to us."

Businesses across Iowa should be coming to the same conclusions, argues CIRAS account manager Brenda Martin. Companies that fail to plan for future water-related problems could one day face an ugly surprise.

"We have helped some companies with incoming water quality issues that have affected their products and processes," Martin said. "They've had to stop production until they figured it out."

"Long term, we need our manufacturers to be prepared and start to develop strategies so they can survive and be competitive," she said. "We need them to have a corporate water strategy—a company strategy built around knowing that they have enough clean water coming in, that they're not being

wasteful in the processes for their facilities, and that they actually know how much they use, what they need, and what they're putting down the drain."

To help firms prepare, CIRAS is hosting a daylong event on November 8 to aid manufacturers in identifying the looming threats tied to water supply, overuse, and disposal.

Iowa currently has plenty of water, experts agree. But that could change, they caution, with something as simple as a prolonged draught. A 2013 study by two Iowa State University economists estimated that any water shortage severe enough to cause a one-percent decline in Iowa's grain output would cause a rippling wave of higher prices that would eliminate more than 800 jobs and reduce Iowa's industrial output by \$326 million.

Clean water, while plentiful, is not automatic, cautions Angie Kolz, lead water/wastewater engineer with WHKS & Co. in Ames. "You can't just poke a hole in the ground and put a new well in," she said. "You need to go through a permitting process to make sure you're not going to remove water or take it away from somebody else. You can't take that process for granted."

"Regardless, the water supply is less of an impending thing than the wastewater."

Communities across Iowa are expected to face tighter and tighter scrutiny in the coming years over the volume of nutrients such as nitrates and ammonia

that they allow to be released into Iowa streams, Kolz said. When aging rural wastewater treatment systems can't handle the enlarged load, system owners increasingly are turning to nearby manufacturers to pay for a solution. "If you violate a state discharge permit, then somebody is going to ask you to do something, which could be very expensive," Kolz said.

For Bill Zimmerle, doing something means taking control.

Valent BioSciences believes the company will be better off if its biochemical operations can be run in harmony with the pretreatment plant. Joint control means the treatment plant, which is capped at the amount of water it can handle each day, wouldn't be surprised by VBC's output. And VBC would no longer be shocked by sudden decisions to take the waterplant offline for maintenance.

Zimmerle said VBC is working on ways to cut back on the water it uses and capture as much as possible for reuse before it leaves the plant. Longer term, it eventually may make sense for VBC to protect its future supply by partnering with Osage on a community drinking water plant—something that would both help the company and eliminate the need

for water softeners in Osage area homes.

The math as to what does or doesn't make sense for VBC is still being calculated, Zimmerle said. But those are the kinds of decisions that have to be explored.

CIRAS' Brenda Martin intends to lead exactly that kind of exploration at the event in November.

"It's a culture shift," she said. "We're going to try to get them thinking about water as strategically as they would anything else in their supply chain."

**Water Technologies:  
Developing Your  
Long-Term Strategy**  
9:30 a.m. on November 8, 2018  
Des Moines

For details, visit  
<https://bit.ly/2MJmpOL>

➤ For more information, contact Brenda Martin at [bkmartin@iastate.edu](mailto:bkmartin@iastate.edu) or 515-570-5282.



## American Power Systems Prepares to Energize Its Export Business

*A Davenport manufacturer of alternators and other electrical equipment for specialty vehicles expects to more than double the amount it sells overseas within the next three years.*

Officials at American Power Systems Inc. predict the company will at least double its current six-figure export sales once it fully implements everything leaders learned during a CIRAS-driven class presented via the Quad Cities Manufacturing Innovation Hub.

“It’s a matter of being strategic,” said Brandy Welvaert, marketing and communications manager for American Power Systems. “We’re looking at what we would like to accomplish, making a plan, and having those actionable steps to do what we set out to do.”

American Power Systems was one of three companies that participated in an ExporTech class provided last fall by CIRAS, Iowa’s U.S. Commercial Services office, the Iowa Economic Development



Authority, and other partners on behalf of the Quad Cities Chamber.

CIRAS for several years has worked to educate companies via the three-part program, which was developed as part of the MEP National Network along with the U.S. Department of Commerce. Classes involve hands-on sessions with a few companies each year. Business leaders work with experts to craft individual plans for marketing and selling their products overseas.

“Most Iowa companies want to do more in the way of selling to other countries,” said CIRAS project manager Marc Schneider. “But it’s hard to get started if you don’t know where to begin.”

Welvaert said the program walked American Power Systems through every step of what it takes to export and helped the company discover new resources for finding customers.

“We got really strategic, and we were able to spend time digging into everything from what our value proposition is and ‘Who is our target audience?’ to ‘Where are they located?’”

### AT A GLANCE

#### American Power Systems Inc.

**FOUNDED:** 2006

**EMPLOYEES:** 13

**OVERVIEW:** The company began by powering high-end automotive add-ons, such as stereo equipment. It now focuses on armored and security vehicles.

**IMPACT:** After attending ExporTech, the company expects to more than double its overseas business within three years.

**LEARN MORE:**  
[www.americanpowerinc.com](http://www.americanpowerinc.com)

Welvaert said. “It answered a lot of questions we didn’t know we had.”

One key question concerns customer relationships. An important business for the company involves providing equipment for large military and security vehicles—vehicles with growth markets in South Africa, Afghanistan, and the United Arab Emirates. American Power Systems has long maintained a procedure for vetting potential customers, but ExporTech provided additional resources that have helped the company make its background checks stronger.

“We try really hard to make sure that our products are only used by the right people,” Welvaert said. “ExporTech provided us with some better means to do that.”

➤ For more information, contact Marc Schneider at [maschn@iastate.edu](mailto:maschn@iastate.edu) or 563-221-1596.

## AT A GLANCE

### VT Industries Inc.

FOUNDED: 1956

EMPLOYEES: 450

**OVERVIEW:** Maker of doors and countertop surfaces for homes and businesses across the country.

**IMPACT:** \$24.3 million from 2016 through 2018.

**LEARN MORE:** [www.vtindustries.com](http://www.vtindustries.com)

# After Help from CIRAS Tech Scouting, VT Industries Opens Door to a Whole New Business

*A quick five years after its journey began, a Holstein, Iowa, door-maker's quest to find new alternatives for one of its products has morphed into a massive new business and a new company-owned recipe for producing fireproof doors.*

VT Industries has been making doors and countertops since 1956. The family-owned company used to purchase the fireproof core for its commercial doors from an outside supplier. But VT officials decided in 2013 that it was time to investigate a replacement for the fireproof substance. Company engineers reached out to CIRAS for suggestions.

CIRAS project manager Shankar Srinivasan said VT began with an open mind. Leaders just wanted the new substance, whatever it might be, to meet safety requirements and be easier to handle than the previous mineral-based material.

"When we started the technology scouting project, the only goal was to find materials that met their needs," Srinivasan said. "They basically said, 'Go find something that's

fireproof and less brittle, so it's easier to produce.'"

Srinivasan eventually compiled technical information on five potential new materials. VT officials selected one and began their own research process—something that expanded significantly when VT later purchased Clarksville-based Creative Composites. What followed was several years of refinement and periodic CIRAS-arranged

tests (including work by CIRAS project managers Paul Berge and Adam Boesenberg) to make certain that everything was able to perform as it must.

In 2015, VT built a new \$10 million factory in Clarksville and hired 12 people to start making the new substance—both for use in VT's fireproof doors and for sale elsewhere in the construction industry.

"Without CIRAS' help, the process wouldn't have been near as convenient or as quick."

—Ralph Scheidecker

**Below:** Part of the production line that makes the cores of fireproof doors for VT Industries. **Above Right:** Photos from lab testing show a VT door from the side away from an in-progress fire (left) and after the fire side was sprayed with an extinguisher.



Combined, the company estimates that its work with CIRAS has had an economic impact of more than \$24 million over the last three years, including at least \$2 million in new sales.

Cordell Burton, director of engineering for VT Industries, said CIRAS helped put his company on the right track and provided needed expertise along the way.

"The main thing Iowa State helped with is the environmental effect for our kind of product," Burton said. "How does the chemical structure complement what we need mechanically? We could get the base measurement of that, but you helped confirm the details with equipment that we don't have."

"Without CIRAS' help, the process wouldn't have been near as convenient or as quick," said Creative Composites plant manager Ralph Scheidecker. "There are very few materials development projects that can go this fast to market."

> For more information, contact Shankar Srinivasan at [srigshan@iastate.edu](mailto:srigshan@iastate.edu) or 515-290-6702.

## AT A GLANCE

### American Packaging

FOUNDED: 1903

EMPLOYEES: 155 (Iowa), 929 (US)

**OVERVIEW:** In Iowa, American Packaging makes flexible food packaging that customers use to create sealed bags with custom logos.

**IMPACT:** At least \$2 million, mostly in new sales stemming from CIRAS-arranged packaging tests.

**LEARN MORE:** [www.ampcorp.com](http://www.ampcorp.com)

# American Packaging Finds Its Future Following Proof of French Fry Potential

*American Packaging in Story City landed a \$750,000 contract and a new line of business because CIRAS helped the company prove that it could reliably produce plastic bags that a potential customer needed for frozen french fries.*

Thom Marsh, American Packaging engineering manager, said CIRAS quickly proved via tests on the Iowa State University campus that a potential American Packaging customer would reliably be able to draw air out of the french fry bags. Without CIRAS, it would have cost the company \$60,000 and three months to arrange for equipment and comparable testing at an outside lab, he said.

As it was, the \$750,000 contract eventually grew into a \$3 million business, Marsh said—and more potentially is on the way.

“It opened up that entire marketplace for us,” he said. “So, we’re developing another opportunity right now with another company doing the same thing.”

CIRAS experts routinely work with Iowa companies to arrange scientific tests exploring how various products perform

under different conditions. In American Packaging’s case, the experiments were completed only four days after Marsh’s original phone call expressing a need.

“The speed was great, and the cost was minimal,” Marsh said. “For an Iowa business to be able to grow by utilizing the equipment that’s there at the university, that’s phenomenal.”

Based in Columbus, Wisconsin, the 116-year-old American Packaging has five plants, including a flexographic printing and laminating facility in Story City. The Iowa factory largely makes flexible food packaging—rolls of printed plastic material that a customer can turn into sealed bags.

According to Marsh, the company experienced “significant growth” in Story City and has more than doubled its number of Iowa employees since the end of 2014. American Packaging also recently rejoined Iowa State’s Polymer and Food Protection Consortium and has been working since fall 2017 with a CIRAS-arranged company to reorganize the Story City factory and improve its workflow.

“We’ve done approximately \$70 million in expansions during that period, in which we’ve added on building space as well as equipment,” Marsh said. “We’re hoping to systematize the way everything goes through, so it’s easy and simple for people to move around and do their jobs.

“We’re basically depending on CIRAS to help take us back to the efficiency we used to see.”



**Top:** Workers move spindles of completed packaging. **Bottom:** An American Packaging employee checks quality on a bag for frozen potatoes.

➤ For more information, contact Derek Thompson at [thompson@iastate.edu](mailto:thompson@iastate.edu) or 515-419-2163.

## WindSmart Systems Improves Its Products While Getting Ready for Government Contracting

A Des Moines-based commercial roof replacement manufacturer is seeding the ground for potential future government contracts even as it works with CIRAS on an innovative new product that could change the commercial marketplace for low-slope roofs.

Steve Pyle, marketing and brand manager for WindSmart Systems, says new wind-equalization vents the company recently perfected, combined with proprietary sealing techniques, help balance the air flow and protect the roofs on commercial buildings from damaging wind uplift. In the process, the vents also help reduce the lifetime cost of a roof by as much as 50 percent by removing trapped moisture that can damage insulation or other underlying roofing materials.

WindSmart CEO Dave Harvey said the company is focused primarily on selling to commercial building owners—although Harvey hopes roughly 20 percent of his business eventually will involve government structures.

Jodi Essex, a government contracting specialist with the CIRAS Procurement Technical Assistance Program (PTAP), has been working with WindSmart to educate federal procurement officials about the company and get its roof designs factored into future federal plans. Although those meetings have yet to turn into any government contracts, Essex has been successful in connecting the company with a variety of other CIRAS services.

It was a CIRAS-coordinated capstone team of student engineers who helped WindSmart do its initial redesign of the equalization vents. Chris Hill, director of the CIRAS Technology Assistance Program (TAP), then helped the company turn those designs into manufacturable and functional prototypes that could be tested by Underwriters Laboratories. (WindSmart says the tests showed its vents to be capable of handling the highest wind uplift forces in the industry.)

CIRAS also helped connect the company with another Iowa manufacturer to produce WindSmart's new vents.

"I would have to say that the relationship with Iowa State and CIRAS has been very positive and valuable for us," Harvey said. "I would describe the CIRAS people and organization as highly professional, committed to quality results, and truly outstanding collaborators."

"Jodi has helped educate us, and CIRAS has proven to be an invaluable resource," Pyle said. "Without CIRAS, we would not have this new innovative product, and it would not have been produced within our home state of Iowa."

**For more information, contact Jodi Essex at [jodir@iastate.edu](mailto:jodir@iastate.edu) or 515-509-0769.**



WindSmart leaders meet with CIRAS to discuss the latest iteration of the new vents (in red).

- **You Are a Certified Targeted Small Business (TSB)—What's Next?**  
 September 5, 2018  
 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.  
 Webinar
- **CIRAS/CCUR Capabilities Overview and Fermentation Lab Tour**  
 September 11, 2018  
 9:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.  
 Ames
- **GovCon Networking Group**  
 October 4, 2018  
 7:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m.  
 Council Bluffs
- **Materials, Structures, and Nondestructive Lab Tour**  
 October 18, 2018  
 9:45 a.m. to 2:15 p.m.  
 Ames
- **3D Printing and Polymers Lab Tour**  
 November 18, 2018  
 9:45 a.m. to 2:15 p.m.  
 Ames

### FOR THE RECORD

Key pillars of the CIRAS support structure were renewed by separate government agencies this summer in moves that mean CIRAS will continue to maintain access to its vast network of expertise. The U.S. Defense Logistics Agency in July renewed CIRAS as Iowa's local Procurement Technical Assistance Center. CIRAS will receive roughly \$660,000 during fiscal 2019. The money will be matched with CIRAS funds to provide more than \$1.2 million of assistance to Iowa businesses in navigating the world of government contracting.

CIRAS also received its second year of funding under its agreement with the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) to serve as Iowa's affiliate of NIST's Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP). As part of a long-term agreement, \$1.9 million of federal money will be matched with CIRAS funds to create a program budget of \$3.8 million.



Justin Woods and the reason he sought CIRAS assistance.

## Quick Service by CIRAS Metallurgist Gives ALMACO Peace of Mind

*A Nevada, Iowa-based agricultural equipment company saved a possible \$12 million worth of business because CIRAS metallurgists helped the company confirm the viability of a new machine.*

ALMACO, a 134-year-old company that makes custom equipment for seed researchers, was in the process of manufacturing a prototype combine in February when workers noticed problems with part of an axle assembly. A steel plate that had been bent during the production process was tearing along a seam.

Justin Woods, ALMACO's quality and continuous improvement manager, said the cracks weren't a threat to the new machine's stability. But they prompted concerns about what might happen if the wrong material was used to construct the combine's frame.

Woods contacted CIRAS project manager Adam Boesenberg for help. Had ALMACO been using the wrong type of steel? Had their supplier made a mistake? A customer was waiting for one of the machines. A potential \$600,000

purchase—and possibly 20 more behind that—might disappear if production had to begin again.

"Many times people ask us for help and say, 'Hey, what's wrong with this part?'" Boesenberg said. "This was different, because Justin had an immediate need, and he also wanted to understand firsthand the tools and methods we would use for the diagnosis."

Days after his call for help, Woods met Boesenberg to observe the process of testing the steel's hardness and chemistry. With Woods watching, Boesenberg explained why each test was being conducted and what was being learned about the steel. He eventually diagnosed that the metal would meet ALMACO's needs.

"What it meant was we didn't have to call our supplier, reorder more material,

and start all over again," Woods said. He praised CIRAS for responding to customer needs.

"Adam was brilliant," Woods said. "His critical analysis and explanations, as well as his recognition of the pinch I was in, gave me the results I needed and, ultimately, a path to move forward."

"Iowa State delivered," he said. "It's been incredibly helpful."

### AT A GLANCE

#### ALMACO

**FOUNDED:** 1884

**EMPLOYEES:** 150

**OVERVIEW:** Founded as a Story County blacksmith shop, ALMACO evolved into a maker of custom agriculture equipment for seed researchers around the world.

**IMPACT:** Nearly \$1.2 million from CIRAS work over two years, plus up to \$12 million from the project above.

**LEARN MORE:** <https://www.almaco.com>

➤ For more information, contact Adam Boesenberg at [aboesenb@iastate.edu](mailto:aboesenb@iastate.edu) or 515-294-5903.





## Osborn Joins CIRAS as Project Manager for Growth

Cary J. "C.J." Osborn joined CIRAS as a Newton-based project manager leading our growth services on the Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) team. C.J., who previously worked as a strategy and marketing consultant, has a bachelor's degree in business from Iowa State University and a master's in business administration from Drake University. He brings more than 25 years of experience with national companies involved in agriculture, windows and doors, financial services, home appliances, and process controls.



## Mohr Retires after 20 Years Helping Train Iowa Businesses

Jeff Mohr, a CIRAS project manager who built a career out of helping Iowa manufacturers become more productive, has retired after nearly 20 years of service to Iowa business and industry. Jeff, a former CNC operator and factory assembler, spent 11 years as a retail store manager before he came to CIRAS as an engineering student employee in 1997. After graduation, Jeff established himself as a statewide expert in Lean manufacturing and Training Within Industry, in addition to playing a pivotal role in helping grow the Iowa Lean Consortium into a statewide organization. A leader and a mentor within CIRAS for many years, Jeff made it easier for others to find success by helping them listen and communicate better. CIRAS thanks him for his effort and wishes him a happy retirement.

## Engineering Doubles Career Fair Due to Growing Demands

*Employers and job seekers will find more opportunities to connect this fall, when Iowa State University's College of Engineering adds a second engineering career fair.*

Several years of record participation culminated with 451 employers involved in last fall's career fair. But Brian Larson, director of Engineering Career Services, said roughly 70 employers still had to be turned away for lack of space.

"Our goal is not to turn anybody away," Larson said. "We need every single job opportunity for our growing number of students and alumni."

Adding a second career fair will not only allow more employers to participate, but it also will relieve some congestion and spread out the interviews that occur after each fair, he said.

The fairs will be held on September 18 and 25, with both events open to all engineering majors. Would-be employers can be involved with either event, but Larson recommends the latter date for companies that also are participating in the Business, Industry, and Technology Career Fair on September 26.

Dual career fairs means students may need to spend more effort scheduling around their classes, Larson said. But they now will have a total of ten hours to work in visits with businesses that interest them instead of the previous six.



### ■ Agriculture and Life Sciences Ag Career Day

9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., Tuesday, October 9, 2018, Lied Rec Center

CONTACT: [mikegaul@iastate.edu](mailto:mikegaul@iastate.edu)

### ■ Engineering Career Fair

Noon to 5:00 p.m., Tuesday, September 18, 2018, Scheman Building

Noon to 5:00 p.m., Tuesday, September 25, 2018, Hilton Coliseum and Scheman Building

CONTACT: [ecs@iastate.edu](mailto:ecs@iastate.edu)

### ■ Business, Industry, and Technology Career Fair

Noon to 5:00 p.m., Wednesday, September 26, 2018, Hilton Coliseum (Business, Liberal Arts and Sciences, Human Sciences)

CONTACT: [buscs@iastate.edu](mailto:buscs@iastate.edu)

### ■ People to People Career Fair

Noon to 5:00 p.m., Wednesday, September 26, 2018, Scheman Building (Focuses on Human/Social Services, Education, Health/Wellness, Government, and Hospitality; Hosted by the Colleges of Human Sciences and Liberal Arts and Sciences)

CONTACT: [hscareers@iastate.edu](mailto:hscareers@iastate.edu)



Dee-Zee Inc. holds a Manufacturing Day lunch and tour in 2017.

## Planning Now Under Way for a More Relationship-intensive MFG Day

Iowa's nationally renowned campaign to encourage the statewide celebration of national Manufacturing Day has gotten a slight makeover in 2018—with new people leading Iowa State University's efforts and an increased emphasis on reaching out to children and educators.

More than 8,000 Iowans attended nearly 150 events last October as part of the annual commemoration of American manufacturing. CIRAS worked with a host of civic and professional agencies—including community colleges, Elevate Iowa, the Iowa Area Development Group, the Iowa Association of Business and Industry, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, and Iowa Workforce Development—to coordinate and schedule the events.

In 2018, the CIRAS portion of the effort is being overseen by Camille Sloan Schroeder, program manager of K-12 Outreach for Iowa State's College of Engineering, and CIRAS economic

development program manager Mark Reinig.

Among other things, Sloan Schroeder's office currently oversees Iowa's involvement in FIRST LEGO League, engineering kids' camps, and related outreach. "My goal is to get more awareness not only from the communities that have done Manufacturing

Day in the past, but also in making it more systemic," Sloan Schroeder said. "We're trying to connect to the K-12 audience in a broader way."

Sloan Schroeder said she has tried to encourage company involvement by putting together prepackaged flyers, agendas, and invitations for companies

to use in promoting certain types of "MFG Day" events. Such steps "make it less intimidating," she said. "We want to take away any sort of barriers that keep people from saying yes."

Companies, using a new lesson plan that Sloan Schroeder created, also have been encouraged to connect with Iowa classrooms to talk about manufacturing careers and the opportunities that are available in Iowa factories. The focus of the outreach has been on building relationships—regardless of whether companies are able to take part in an October event.

"This isn't something that people have to just do in October," she said. "People can celebrate manufacturing all year long."

Planning for the October celebration, however, is still under way.

"We're trying to connect to the K-12 audience in a broader way."  
— Camille Sloan Schroeder

➤ For more information or to get your event scheduled, contact [manufacturingday@iastate.edu](mailto:manufacturingday@iastate.edu).

## Blue-9 Celebrates One-year Anniversary of New Iowa Headquarters for The Klimb™

A small Maquoketa company that sells dog training equipment around the world is boosting production and expanding its product offerings—all after CIRAS helped the company arrange important testing and other steps to get it off the ground.

Blue-9 LLC is now in its third year of selling The Klimb™, a small, patented elevated platform that has become a popular tool for dog trainers around the country.

Owner David Blake says production of the training platforms has tripled since 2015. The tables are sold primarily online and at trade shows.

“The Klimb is used in about 100 PetSmart stores right now, because PetSmart has recognized the value in platform training and purchased them for its trainers,” Blake said. “But they’re not for sale in PetSmart. We’re growing fast enough right now, to be honest.”

Blue-9 uses key suppliers from Wisconsin and Illinois but assembles and ships its products—both The Klimb and the company’s top-rated dog harness—from a Maquoketa building that Blue-9 purchased last fall.

CIRAS project managers Shankar Srinivasan and John Roberts helped arrange load-bearing tests for The Klimb after Blake attended a CIRAS summit for plastics manufacturers in 2014. CIRAS also helped connect Blake with financial assistance at the Iowa Economic Development Authority.

“CIRAS was an integral part of my overall beginning, period,” Blake said. “You helped me obtain financing, and you helped me a lot with the research and development, as far as verification.”

**For more information, contact Shankar Srinivasan at [srigshan@iastate.edu](mailto:srigshan@iastate.edu) or 515-290-6702.**

### AT A GLANCE

#### BLUE-9

**FOUNDED:** 2014

**EMPLOYEES:** 2

**OVERVIEW:** The Maquoketa-based company sells training platforms (and accessories) used for training dogs.

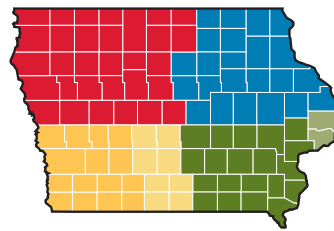
**IMPACT:** \$281,000 from CIRAS projects that helped with the company’s inception.

**LEARN MORE:** <https://www.blue-9.com>

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Since 1963, we have delivered proven services to enhance the performance of industry. Our approach—Engage. Educate. Embed.—creates specific solutions that allow each business and its community to prosper and grow. Coupled with a satisfaction guarantee, our typical client has achieved a 200% ROI. Clients have reported an economic impact of more than \$2 billion over the past five years.

**Find your county to find your best introduction to CIRAS.** In addition to four regional account managers, CIRAS has five regional government contracting specialists,\* a statewide account manager for the food industry, and one for economic development. More staff information can be found at [www.ciras.iastate.edu/staff.asp](http://www.ciras.iastate.edu/staff.asp).



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## *GROWING YOUR BUSINESS*

### **A Good Elevator Speech Can Help You Maximize Opportunity** *by Mary Zimmerman*

*All it takes is a few good seconds to make a positive first impression and grow your business.*

However, those few seconds can require hours of preparation to look natural, confident, and enthusiastic. And even then, it doesn't always work. For example, at most meetings, conferences, and networking events, people are asked to introduce themselves and talk about their company. This is their time to shine! But many miss their chance at free advertising because they are uncomfortable or have trouble explaining what they do or sell.

How do you avoid a wasted opportunity? The answer is to have a prepared elevator speech.

The term "elevator speech" refers to what the situation mirrors—being in an elevator with someone you want to impress. You've only got a few floors to make that impression. What would you say to a contracting officer, elected official, prime contractor, or potential customer? Are you ready to quickly and professionally describe the **solutions** you represent and the **expertise** you can deliver?

An elevator speech should be interesting, memorable, and succinct. It also should explain what makes you—or your

organization, product, or idea—unique. A solid elevator speech will distill down to the purest form of exactly who you are, what you offer, and what sets you apart from all the other competitors.

How do you put one together? Later this year, CIRAS will offer a workshop that will teach you how to develop and deliver the five key elements of a good elevator speech:

1. Who and what you are
2. What you specialize in
3. What you do
4. Why you're the best at what you do
5. What you want (a call to action)

Presentation is just as important as what you say. Practice your elevator speech **OUT LOUD**, focusing on inflection, projection, and nonverbal (body and facial) expressions. When you can present it smoothly, you'll be on your way to making the most of your opportunities.

➤ **For more information, contact a government contracting specialist with CIRAS' Procurement Technical Assistance Program (PTAP). Mary Zimmerman can be reached at [maryz@iastate.edu](mailto:maryz@iastate.edu) or 515-450-1278.**