

## Eastern Washington Businesses Get Lean

Appeared September 2006 in the *Tri-City Herald*

The term “lean” generally conjures images of food or weight loss. However, these days the term is also being used to describe a way of doing business that maximizes production output and minimizes waste. In the spring of 2005, several businesses in the Spokane area got together and formed a group to encourage Lean business practices called Inland Northwest Lean Management Consortium.

Michael Schneider of Washington Manufacturing Services and a board member of Inland Northwest LMC described the Spokane group as a “self-help networking organization for businesses that are interested in or are currently practicing Lean Management principles.” Member companies meet monthly and occasionally take turns hosting tours of their facilities. During the tours, hosting companies highlight the Lean Principles they have put into practice.

According to Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia, “Lean is basically all about getting the right things, to the right place, at the right time, in the right quantity while minimizing waste and being flexible and open to change.” The concept of Lean Production was originally developed by Taiichi Ohno of the Toyota Company and has since been adopted by companies all over the world. His ideas have led to better quality and improved product flow.

The organization that Schneider works for is a not-for-profit company that promotes manufacturing in Washington state. Washington Manufacturing Services is a member of Inland Northwest LMC to support the other member businesses in their efforts to employ Lean Principles.

Schneider is pleased with the progress of Inland Northwest LMC, “the organization has been exceptionally successful,” he said. Originally established as a manufacturing initiative, the appeal of the consortium was so broad that the mission was expanded to include all types of business. “I am very surprised at how quickly Inland Northwest LMC has caught on,” continued Schneider. “The membership has become quite broad-based.”

The current chairman of Inland Northwest LMC, Darren Stuck of Wilcox Family Farms described the purpose of the organization in a recent interview with the Spokane Journal of Business, “We’ve tried to bridge the gap in terms of those seeking education” about lean management. “Most people aren’t in tune enough to know how to get it.”

The Inland Northwest LMC now has approximately 60 member companies and monthly meetings draw around 100 people. Their mission is to “seek out and promote the best Lean Management practices in business, with the goal of strengthening each participating individual and member organization, while positively impacting the regional economy.”

The membership of Inland Northwest LMC ranges from large global manufacturing companies to smaller companies with a more regional market. For more information on Inland Northwest LMC go to [www.inlandnwlm.com](http://www.inlandnwlm.com).