

OURVIEW

Editorials

Manufacturing situation optimistic

Our regional economy got a shot of good news with recent reports that manufacturing jobs have stabilized in Erie County and have actually risen in Crawford County.

The reason for optimism goes beyond the actual number and percentage of jobs tied to manufacturing in the two counties. Local observers point to a shift in the way business is done here, and if that's the case, we are headed in the right direction.

First, though, the statistics:

OUR POINT In the last five years in Erie County, we've lost just 200 manufacturing jobs overall, according to the Economic Research Institute of Erie. With 16.5 percent of Erie County residents making things for a living, Erie County has the 12th-highest concentration of manufacturing jobs in the U.S., according to a recent Wall Street Journal Report.

A stabilized manufacturing situation bodes well for the regional economy.

In Crawford County, the number of manufacturing jobs has rebounded, from 7,595 in 2003 to 8,000 today. Mark Turner, executive director of the Economic Progress Alliance of Crawford County, says that new, smaller companies have filled voids left when larger companies downsized or closed altogether.

"My perspective is that manufacturers who have a commitment to stay domestic will find a way to remain competitive," says Brian Dean, president of Nu-Tec Tooling Systems Inc. in Meadville, where his work force once dipped to 28 but is now up to 55. "There is a certain segment of manufacturing that is going to make a commitment to improve its processes and products and remain in the United States."

Jake Rouch, vice president of economic development for the Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership, has a similar view of the current manufacturing environment.

"You are not going to find many employers who have added that many jobs. It's a great success story of workers partnering with management and getting the global picture," Rouch says.

Rouch also noted another change in the climate. "Right now, the weak dollar has made us very attractive for international investors. We have gone from being a highest-cost producer to a lower-cost producer."

If northwestern Pennsylvania has finally heard the message that globalization is here to stay, that's a remarkable change in attitude that bodes well for our future.

Sometimes, that world is still as close as the rest of the country. Dad's Pet Care in Meadville has added employees recently as part of a plan to expand from a regional to a national company.

That's quite a success story for a family-owned business that dates back to the Depression, when George "Dad" Lang came up with an affordable dog biscuit for his litter of Springer pups.

In the next few weeks, Dad's will be touting its story during the "Secret to Family Owned Dog and Cat Food Sampling Tour" at various fairs, including the Crawford County Fair on Aug. 16-23.

It's good to share this story close to home.