

Bringing businesses to the table . . .

The City of Chicago's David Hanson speaks up for manufacturers

By Ingrid Gonçalves

Manufacturers should play a role in directing the use of government assistance for their industry — at least according to David Hanson, Executive Director of Business Development Services (BDS) in Chicago's Department of Community Development (DCD). Under Hanson's leadership, the City of Chicago has funded and implemented a number of programs geared explicitly toward meeting the needs of advanced manufacturers.

"We are undergoing an evolution," Hanson says, "a paradigm shift in workforce development: working together with businesses and developing programs that help workers by giving them the skills that they need to be employed in good jobs, which in turn grows the industry."

The transition began about five years ago. At the time, Hanson headed the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development (MOWD), which merged with other city departments earlier this year to form DCD. Unemployment was on the rise in Chicago, so the MOWD looked at industries where opportunities for growth, unmet needs, and middle skill job opportunities existed.

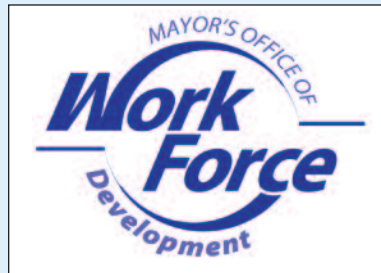
Hanson says they also looked at a 2003 report by the Center for Labor & Community Research (CLCR), *The State of Illinois Manufacturing*, which found that the industry was losing ground due to competition from low-wage producers in developing countries.

In order to survive and grow, Illinois manufacturers would need to add value to their products in order to justify higher prices — a transition that would require a robust workforce development infrastructure to train employees with the skills necessary to build complex, high-tech products like pacemakers and wind turbines.

Hanson took to heart the report's recommendation of a partnership between government, labor, and business in order to find universally

beneficial solutions. "As a result of the report," he says, "we helped fund and develop the Chicago Manufacturing Renaissance Council (CMRC), which is an unusual partnership because it took people who were usually adversaries — management and labor — and brought them together under a common goal."

With the CMRC's support, Hanson spearheaded the creation of ManufacturingWorks, a human resource and workforce development program, in 2005. Just last year, ManufacturingWorks helped 394



local companies meet their workforce needs and placed 1,682 workers in jobs paying an average hourly wage of \$12.31, up from \$11.17 the previous year. The innovation behind ManufacturingWorks lies in its employer demand-driven strategy, a framework that today drives all BDS programs.

"We take a consultative approach to our work at companies," explains Javier Hernandez, a ManufacturingWorks account executive. "We work with them to help fix their problems and implement a real systems change in manufacturing, company by company. We feel that our work is really aligned with what the CMRC is trying to do. We want to take those big ideas, formalize them, and turn them into customized solutions that we can deliver to companies."

Individuals, on the other hand, benefit just as much from ManufacturingWorks' employer-driven strategy. Because of the partnership between ManufacturingWorks and



David Hanson

Mayor Daley's WorkNet Chicago, job seekers have access to over 25 agencies around the area that can get them into training and bring them up to speed. The City funds much of this with federal Workforce Investment Act dollars.

The manufacturing industry faces growing challenges, but Hanson is optimistic that city policy is moving in the right direction. "We need to develop a lean manufacturing sector with succession planning and diversification, and that's hard to do with current funding," he says. "But now with DCD, we have a more holistic view of economic development that includes workforce development, which will be reflected in our use of competitive grants, if we get them, from the stimulus package."

One of DCD's competitive grant proposals requests funding for a manufacturing training center at Austin Polytechnical Academy, a small public high school on Chicago's West Side that prepares students for careers in advanced manufacturing. The training center would be used by high school students during the day and by adults on evenings and weekends.

How can manufacturers get their voices heard? "Join the Renaissance Council, get involved with Austin Polytech, reach out to ManufacturingWorks," Hanson says. "Take advantage of these demand-driven partnerships that already exist, and continue to strengthen them with your support and involvement." ■