



## Working together pays for Trussworthy

Partnership provides training for Pine River truss firm

By [RENEE RICHARDSON](#)

Senior Reporter

PINE RIVER - Providing jobs in Pine River was a central goal in Craig Anderson's desire to start his own business here.

"I wanted to work in my hometown," Anderson said. "If I can provide jobs for someone else great. I want to be able to do that."

Anderson invested \$943,000 to construct his manufacturing facility, Trussworthy Components, in October 2005. The company manufactures and wholesales building trusses, that basic skeletal structure beneath a building's skin.

Recently the manufacturer benefited from a grant for worker training that embraces technology. The project brought together a partnership between the business, government and education. The process involved key employees in creating a training program beyond the dry paper manual that should result in a more productive and safe workplace.

It all began with a phone call.

Trussworthy contacted Bemidji State University seeking grant options for safety training. While the university didn't have an exact fit, education officials said they might have something that would be helpful.

After a plant tour and brainstorming - filling a conference wall with sticky notes - with existing staff, BSU helped Trussworthy focus on three needed training areas.

The partnership included the Center for Research and Innovation at BSU and Rural Minnesota Concentrated Employment Program, based in the Brainerd WorkForce Center, and grant dollars for workforce development from the Department of Employment and Economic Development.

"It was just the right place at the right time," said Craig Nathan, operations manager at the Brainerd WorkForce Center. The goal connecting industry and training dollars was to help an existing business grow and in doing so create jobs in the area, Nathan said.

Part of the effort, Nathan said, was to help Trussworthy workers increase their job skills and their ability for career advancement and higher wages. Worker programs are designed to help the small business employer, Nathan said. Benefits include increasing employee retention and promoting life-long

learning as well as helping the business expand and compete in competitive markets.

The Center for Research and Innovation helped Trussworthy in three main training areas. Workers were educated on key concepts of advanced manufacturing, including lean manufacturing and productivity enhancement. A second area involved standard operating procedures to be more efficient, reduce waste and streamline production time. A third area looked at eliminating waste using a flow chart as a critical tool in process mapping. The maps look at the process from customer order and raw material through to the end product.

Anderson said they hope to build on these areas, particularly in eliminating waste, in the future.

One of the main things the company received from the project was a visual tool in training workers. BSU visually documented work, created scripts and made the training videos. Tasks included operating saws, setting up a truss initially and truss building and safety. The training images may be modified in the future as needed. Anderson said they will come in handy for new and existing employees.

Benefits come in efficiency and in making sure everyone knows the duties and best way to go about them, Anderson said. Safety is stressed throughout. Goals for the company included finding ways to streamline and improve productivity. Twenty-one people were trained through the program. When at full capacity during the busy season, Trussworthy employs about 26 people.

Anderson said he's benefited from tools that can track the process to determine how much waste there is. He's been able to take advantage of mentoring and assistance aimed at making him a better manager. Assistance in getting the company running came from the Cass County Economic Development Corp. and the Initiative Fund.

Anderson said when he first talked to Gail Levenson at Cass County EDC, he wasn't even aware of Pine River's industrial park. And he has hired staff members through the Brainerd WorkForce Center, which helped him set up templates for job descriptions. Central Lakes College and the Small Business Development Center also assisted.

"If you have a good idea and are willing to work at it there are tons of help out there," Anderson said.

The slowdown in the housing market hasn't been considered a downside to the company, Anderson said. Earlier growth had the manufacturer almost too busy, he said. Early revenues were almost \$1 million. Now, Anderson said revenues are \$1.7 million. Trussworthy works mostly with high-end residential and light commercial. Anderson said he believes the company's goal of being a stickler for quality has helped it through the downturn.

Anderson started with five investors, most of them either in the Pine River

area or with local connections. Educated as a teacher, Anderson has been involved in the wood industry much of his life. Working with trusses melded his love of math, science and engineering with practical construction in a creative environment. While starting his own business was more work than he expected, Anderson doesn't regret the decision.

Five years from now, Anderson said he's likely to have a sales revenue of \$3 million. His current site has options for expansion in phases and could include manufacturing wall panels in the future.

"I want to keep it a small company where everybody knows everybody."

RENEE RICHARDSON may be reached at  
renee.richardson@brainerddispatch.com or 855-5852.

Click here to return to story:

[http://www.brainerddispatch.com/stories/011208/bus\\_20080112018.shtml](http://www.brainerddispatch.com/stories/011208/bus_20080112018.shtml)