



## SCMEP partnership vital to long-term success of Renfrow Brothers

Throughout its history, the South Carolina Manufacturing Extension Program (SCMEP) has proved itself a partner for all seasons, connecting with South Carolina companies to provide training and assistance. Such is the case with Renfrow Brothers, a longtime client that SCMEP has aided on several campaigns.

Most recently, SCMEP helped introduce the plant to the Eureka! Winning Ways program, a scientifically-based process that helps to reinvigorate companies, spike growth, and increase profits. It has been a clear triumph, helping Renfrow Brothers to conceive four new ideas and maximize its chances for success.

"It's a good process for bringing people together," Jamie Renfrow says. "It helps companies look outside the box at areas perhaps never addressed before. It has been a good exercise for us, and we will definitely use their process more. We are confident it will benefit our company down the road."

### Applying Eureka principles

Renfrow Brothers services clients throughout the Southeast

in a number of capacities: engineering, construction, fabrication, rental, sales, temporary staffing, and warehousing.

William Renfrow founded the Spartanburg, S.C., company in 1993, with his brother Jamie serving as vice president. Since its inception, the business has grown from just four employees to more than two hundred. Truly a unique workplace, Renfrow Brothers was founded on Christian tenets, and it regularly supports initiatives to help staff become better employees and people.

Traditionally, Renfrow Brothers sought to develop relationships with its clients, meeting face-to-face with engineering managers, construction managers, and plant managers to secure bids for construction work. It was business -- the old-fashioned way.

But recently that model has been severely tested as more competition and bidders have entered the marketplace. Bid time has been slashed, and average bid prices have declined.

This new way of doing business left Renfrow Brothers scratching their heads and searching for a way to differentiate themselves from the competition. Such dilemmas are tailor made for the Eureka program, a service offered exclusively by SCMEP, a private, non-profit resource for small to mid-size state businesses.

Doug Hall, the well-regarded marketing guru who is widely recognized as "America's No. 1 New Product Idea Man," conceived the program. His clients have included such Fortune 500 companies as Coca-Cola, Nike, Proctor & Gamble, and Nike. E!WW functions as a smaller, more focused version of what Hall offers to his big-gun clients.

Much more than some simple "brainstorming" process, E!WW and SCMEP help clients mine for ideas. Eureka starts by teaming up a cross-section of employees for a series of critical-thinking drills to flush out the strongest concepts. To their credit, Renfrow Brothers applied Eureka principles to devise new products and services, retool their marketing message, and expand their market share.

### **Generating profitable ideas**

The first idea involved the branding of an exceptional quality delivery program. Renfrow Brothers realized that the construction industry, particularly the small construction industry, has very little standardization of processes. The scope changes from job-to-job; some days Renfrow Brothers installs equipment, other days equipment is removed. But the processes, such as scheduling, quality assurance, safety, and time management, largely remain the same.

"We decided to create a process for our work, from selling to planning our projects, to executing the projects in the field, to reviewing those projects afterward," Jamie Renfrow says. "We're monitoring those metrics as we go along to create that standard of operation."

The second concept provides another innovative service: preventative maintenance performed on weekends or off hours, but at straight-time rates. Most companies are forced to hire additional help for preventative maintenance work, or worse, they make their full-time employees work overtime to get the job done. It can be very costly for business and many times the work is far below the employees' skill levels. As such, staff is hardly enthusiastic or efficient regarding the work.

So, instead of going down that course, Renfrow Brothers sends in "lean teams" to perform maintenance on weekends or evenings when the plants are typically closed. "We do it on straight time with people who are exactly skilled for what they're doing," Jamie Renfrow says. "We can design programs based on what type of work is needed, and we can come in and help companies save money, while offering jobs to people who need work."

Another idea called for the creation of a modular box that can improve tool storage and delivery to job sites. Renfrow Brothers has typically kept its tools in large, steel gang boxes, which are lugged between construction sites. Problem is, they're heavy, cumbersome and inefficient, particularly when the company undertakes several projects at once. "There's a lot of time lost moving tools around," Jamie Renfrow says.

So instead, Renfrow Brothers plans to build a box that can be broken into smaller units, easily transported, and packed according to location and requirements. The idea reflects a central lean principle: the elimination of waste. "That way, we can roll the boxes to a central location, put the box back together, and secure it to increase productivity," Jamie Renfrow says.

The fourth concept involves a maintenance training unit that teaches belt and pulley replacement and alignment, ideal for technical schools and similar programs. Created by one of Renfrow Brothers' electrical managers, the company plans to patent and sell the device. "We can fabricate and build all the workings for the trainer," Jamie Renfrow says.

### **Program garners high marks**

On the whole, the Eureka program, and the development of related products and processes, has given Renfrow Brothers greater viability and optimism. Without SCMEP, Jamie Renfrow insists execution would have been unlikely. "I don't think we would have ever had the process to really sit and down and say, 'Is this a good idea or a bad? What are the strengths and weaknesses?'"

SCMEP's methods for discovering, developing, and refining ideas has enabled them to gain the unequivocal support of Renfrow Brothers. "They've got so many tools to help our industry: Lean, 5S training and other beneficial modules," Jamie Renfrow says. "They have great contacts and resources, and I just don't think we would have considered those ideas if we hadn't gone through the Eureka process."